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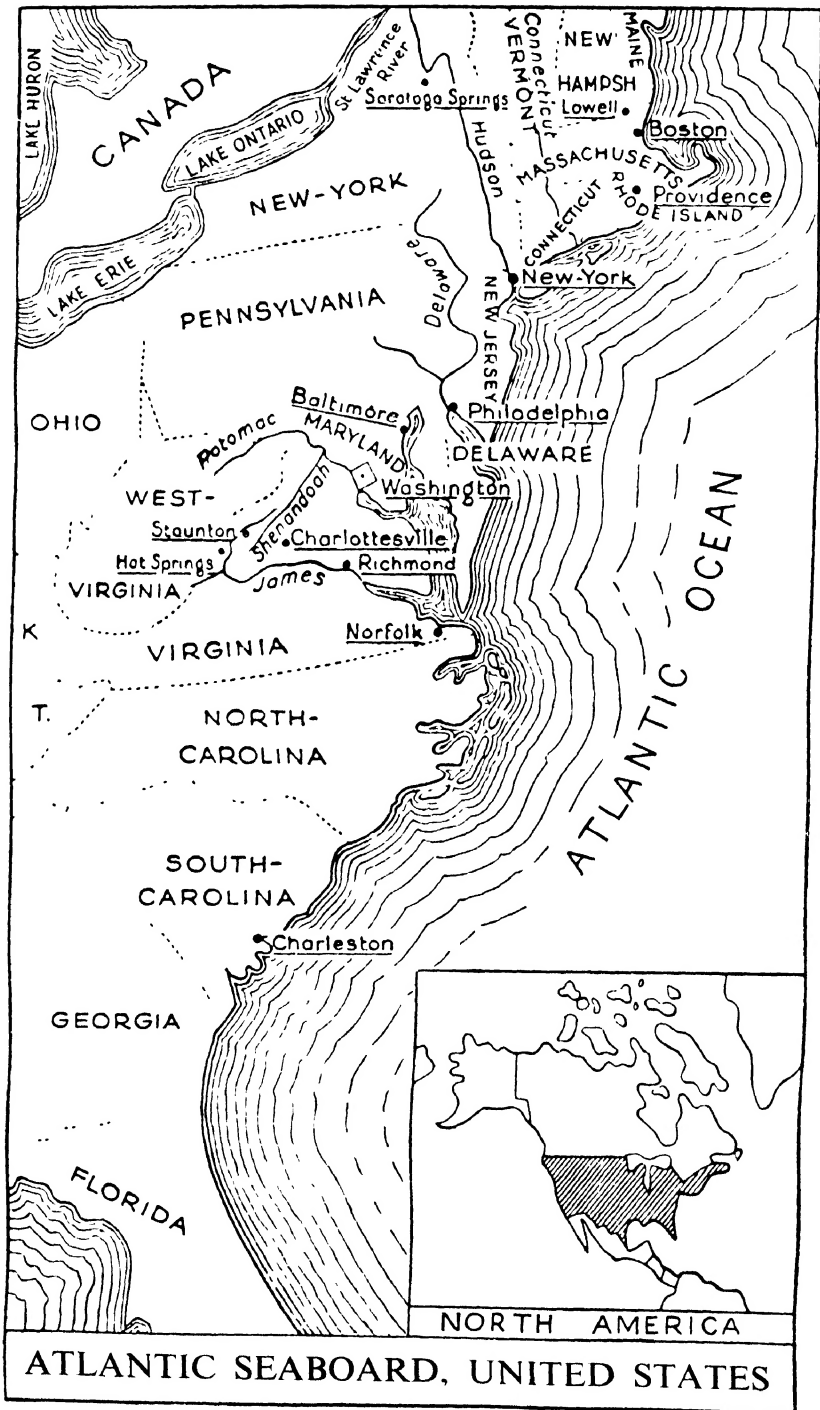
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MARIE BONAPARTE

THE LIFE AND WORKS
OF
EDGAR ALLAN POE

A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation

Foreword by
SIGMUND FREUD
Translated by John Rodker

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her indebtedness to the
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Foreword

IN this book my friend and pupil, Marie Bonaparte, has shone the light of psycho-analysis on the life and work of a great writer with pathologic trends.

Thanks to her interpretative effort, we now realise how many of the characteristics of Poe's works were conditioned by his personality, and can see how that personality derived from intense emotional fixations and painful infantile experiences. Investigations such as this do not claim to explain creative genius, but they do reveal the factors which awaken it and the sort of subject matter it is destined to choose. Few tasks are as appealing as enquiry into the laws that govern the psyche of exceptionally endowed individuals.

SIGM. FREUD

BOOK I

Life and Poems

CHAPTER I

Poe's Parents

EDGAR POE¹ was born at Boston on January 19th, 1809, both parents being actors. David Poe, his father, was the son of "General" David Poe of Baltimore, Assistant Deputy-Quartermaster, in 1778, of the Continental forces, who had been brought to America as a child, his parents being Scotch Protestants established in Ireland. He is said to have rendered Lafayette valuable assistance and to have been highly respected. His son David, however, was both erratic and intractable. Though he began by studying law, a passion for the stage led him, at twenty-six, to join a touring company: the Charleston Players. Later, in 1804, we find him with the Virginia Players touring the Northern States and soon after in the cast of the Federal Theatre, Boston, as was also the young actress Elizabeth Arnold, whom he had just married.

Elizabeth Arnold's parents were Henry Arnold and Elizabeth Smith, both of the London stage. Tradition has it that she was born about 1787 and, when nine, accompanied her mother to America. Her mother, then a widow, soon remarried, her new husband being a Mr. Tubbs, pianist

¹ Throughout the biographical section of this work, I have followed the admirable life of Poe by Hervey Allen, *Israfel* (London, Brentano's, 1927, 2 Vols., 932 pp.). In spite of some misprints as to names and dates, it is the most complete and up-to-date life of Poe we possess. Apart from its basic material for which it is indebted to the labours of Ingram, Woodberry and Harrison, it utilises new documents taken from the *Ellis and Allan Papers*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and the *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, edited by Mrs. Mary Newton Stanard (*Edgar Allan Poe Letters Till Now Unpublished*, Philadelphia and London, J. B. Lippincott Co., 1925,) which throw new and vivid light on the relations between Poe and John Allan, his foster father.

For the rest, almost all my references to Poe's writings are based on the most complete and best critical edition of his work: *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by James A. Harrison, Professor in the University of Virginia, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1902, 17 Vols.. This work, also known as the *Virginia Edition*, will here be referred to by that title.

Titles of other works consulted will be found in the bibliography at the close of this book.

to the Virginia Players. Elizabeth made an early debut on the stage and, thanks to her grace and charm, not unsuccessfully. Subsequently she, her mother and Mr. Tubbs, joined the theatrical troupe of a Mr. Edgar. In 1798 she made an appearance at Philadelphia under the tutelage of a Mr. Usher and Mrs. Snowden. At fifteen she married an actor named Hopkins but there was no issue of this marriage. Three years later Hopkins died and, shortly after, we find her married to David Poe.

Elizabeth was far better equipped for the stage than her new husband who, it appears, had neither assurance nor talent and never managed to rise above minor parts. Though not a great actress, Elizabeth, by her determination and zeal managed to please the public and enjoyed successes as *Ophelia*, *Cordelia*, *Juliet* and occasionally *Ariel*. She also danced and sang well. Nevertheless, the young couple found it hard to make ends meet. Their wretched plight was doubtless worsened by David's weak health—he was evidently tubercular—and by his addiction to drink. There seems no doubt at all that Elizabeth was also tubercular. The rapid decline of her health, the various newspaper appeals in her aid, which all refer to the lingering illness that menaced her life, leave no doubt on this point.

Besides the demands of her exacting profession and the constant struggle with poverty, the young actress was to bear three children in the next three or four years. We know how often pregnancy accelerates the ravages of tuberculosis, and the birth of her first son, William Henry Leonard, at Boston, early in 1807, was soon followed by that of her second, Edgar, also at Boston, in January, 1809. Already, the straightened circumstances of the parents had made it necessary to leave William Henry, at only a few months old, in Baltimore, with his grandparents. Edgar, however, remained with them and was to share both their poverty and their wanderings.

Then in July, 1810, while the company was playing in New York, David Poe suddenly disappeared—literally and figuratively—from the scene. Nor do we know whether he deliberately deserted his family or died. The most likely account suggests that he died of consumption soon after his disappearance.¹

Edgar, now eighteen months, was left alone with his mother, though the mutual companionship did not last long. Meanwhile Elizabeth, who

¹ This tradition is confirmed by a unique newspaper clipping (source unknown) announcing David Poe's death at Norfolk, Virginia, on October 19th, 1810 (cf. Hervey Allen, *Israfel*, p. 13).

had left New York during the summer of 1810, was again playing at Richmond and Norfolk, despite her pregnancy. In December, at Norfolk, a daughter, Rosalie, was born.¹

Some suspicion arose as to the paternity of this child, born several months after the death or disappearance of its legitimate father. This is of some importance to us, given its subsequent injurious effects on Edgar's relation to his foster-father.

Hard pressed by want, Elizabeth Poe, despite her failing health and recent confinement, now toured the Southern circuit: Virginia and the Carolinas. At Charleston, South Carolina, where she appeared in her own benefit performance, the bills referred to her failing health and asked the public to assist an unfortunate actress which it had once loved to applaud. An appeal in a Norfolk newspaper also stated that the young, ailing actress, was left "the sole support of herself and several children".² Soon after, in August, 1811, we find her again at Richmond—scene of her greatest popularity—in time for the opening of the theatrical season.

Here, she rented a cheap room for herself and the two children: Edgar, aged two and a half and Rosalie, a few months old. Her landlady, the milliner Mrs. Phillips, drove a thriving trade in perfumes, cosmetics and similar trifles, with the gentlewomen of the town. This room looked out on the yard of the *Indian Queen Tavern*, where the other members of the troupe lodged.³

¹ Hervey Allen gives two different dates: December 10th (*Israfel*, p. 853) and December 20th (*Israfel*, p. 14).

² *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³ Elizabeth would have been about twenty-four at this time, if the tradition which places her birth round 1787 is correct. It is this tradition which Poe's first critical biographer, John H. Ingram, seems to adopt. (*Edgar Allan Poe, His Life, Letters and Opinions*, new edition, London, W. H. Allen & Co., 1886—(the first edition is dated 1880)).

On the other hand, George E. Woodberry, (*The Life of Edgar Allan Poe, personal and literary with his chief correspondence with men of letters*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909, p. 7, note 1, (first edition dated 1885)), questions this date and inclines to consider, given the dates of the young actress's stage appearances, that she was born round 1780.

James A. Harrison, however, in his biography of Poe, prudently avoids all mention of the date of Elizabeth's birth (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1).

Israfel, (p. 853) adopts Ingram's dates.

I, personally, do not think that Elizabeth's extreme youth on her first appearance before the footlights (at nine or ten) and her first marriage at fifteen or sixteen, given her epoch and the southern latitude, need prove obstacles to our accepting her birth as occurring round 1787.

CHAPTER II

His Mother's Death

ELIZABETH POE has thus been described to us by one who saw her in her prime:

"... the childish figure, the great, wide-open mysterious eyes, the abundant curling hair confined in the quaint bonnet of a hundred years ago and shadowing the brow in raven masses, the high waist and attenuated arms clasped in an Empire robe of faint, flowered design, the tiny but rounded neck and shoulders, the head proudly erect. It is the face of an elf, a sprite, an Undine who was to be the mother of the most elfish, the most unearthly of poets, whose luminous gray eyes had a glint of the supernatural in them and reflected, as he says in one of his earlier poems, 'the wilder'd nature of the man'."¹

Such was Poe's mother, whom illness was to make ever more ethereal and wan, until she finally appeared as that morbid and unearthly sylph whose personifications reappear so constantly in the tales of her son.

She was already a very sick woman when, with her two babes, she reached Richmond, in August 1811,² and moved into Mrs. Phillips' cheap room. Indeed, her health was failing so fast that often she could not act. Doubtless, the children were left more and more to Mrs. Phillips, kind as she seems to have been. At such times, she would take them to her part of the house.

¹ Beverly Tucker, author of a volume entitled *The Partizan Leader*, and sundry articles in the *Southern Literary Messenger*.

The description is dated 1835, and was evidently taken from the miniature which she left to her son-poet.

² According to one Norfolk lady who, as a child, remembered seeing Elizabeth Poe act there in 1811, at which time she made friends with the Poe children, there was a Welsh nurse with them who tended the children and nursed their mother. No justification appears to exist for this story, though, with certain others,

His Mother's Death

Mrs. Phillips's shop was patronised both by The Virginia Players—to which Elizabeth belonged—most of whom lived in the neighbouring *Indian Queen Tavern*, and by the fashionable ladies of Richmond who would doubtless learn from Mrs. Phillips how desperately ill, in one of her rooms, was the mother of the pretty boy who played in the shop or on her doorstep.

Among these customers was a Mrs. Allan who, also, would see Edgar and hear of his mother's illness. Possibly, they were already known to her by sight, for that summer and autumn they would often, doubtless, pass her house on *Fourteenth Street* and *Tobacco Alley* on their way to the theatre where The Virginia Players were then appearing.

Though eight years married to the wealthy Scotch merchant, John Allan, Frances Keeling Allan was childless. We shall never know whether it was in Mrs. Phillips's shop, or earlier, seeing him pass, that the little Edgar first stirred her maternal instinct. But we do know that it was through her that Mrs. William Mackenzie, whose husband was one of John Allan's close friends, and who herself had two children (John and

it appears to have given rise to the legend that Mrs. Poe's mother, widowed again by the death of Mr. Tubbs, the pianist, was with her daughter at this time. (*Israfel*, p. 17.)

In comparison may be noted the account of Elizabeth Arnold's last days by William Fearing Gill (*The Life of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York, W. J. Widdleton: London, Chatto and Windus, 1880, pp. 319-320; 1st Edition, 1877) quoted by Lauvrière (*Edgar Poe, sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris, Alcan, 1904, p. 13). According to Gill, when charitable visitors sought out the Poes "they were found in wretched lodgings, lying upon a straw bed and very sick, Mr. Poe with consumption and his wife with pneumonia. There was no food in the house. They had no money or fuel and their clothes had been pawned or sold. Two little children were with the parents, in the care of an old Welsh woman, who had come over from England with Mrs. Poe, and who was understood to be her mother. The children were half clad, half starved, and very much emaciated. The youngest was in a stupor, caused by being fed on bread steeped in gin. The old woman acknowledged that she was in the habit of so feeding them, 'to keep them quiet and make them strong'."

This testimony is rendered suspect by the inclusion of one notably false detail—David Poe's presence at his wife's death. As we know, David Poe vanished from his wife's existence in July 1810, *i.e.*, over a year before. But the narrative is of interest, if only for the light it throws on the legends that grew round Poe's childhood, in which drink already figures.

Another legend which claimed that David Poe outlived his wife by some weeks was subscribed to by Poe himself, to combat rumours as to Rosalie's birth. (In particular, see the letter from Edgar to William Poe, dated Aug. 20, 1836, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 13-16.)

Mary), now interested herself in the unhappy actress and her babes.

The autumn waned and Elizabeth's condition worsened. She appeared less and less on the stage and, finally, was forced to abandon it altogether. Doubtless, her impresario, Mr. Placide, did what he could for so important a member of his troupe, and Mrs. Phillips would forego her rent, since her sick tenant was now wholly resourceless. Meanwhile Mrs. Allan and Mrs. Mackenzie sent the poor woman food and clothes through Mrs. Phillips.

Elizabeth Poe lay dying in a small, damp room, bare even of fuel to warm it. The James River had recently overflowed its banks and flooded Main Street to within a few doors of the house. The air was thick with malarial mosquitoes. The only furniture in the room was a wretched bed with a straw mattress, a blanket or two provided by Mrs. Phillips, one or two rickety old chairs and, doubtless, a trundle bed for the children. Illumination, at night, was provided by candle ends stuck in bottles. Elizabeth's own belongings were of the simplest: bits of theatrical finery, faded and soiled—the relics of past triumphs—and a small chest containing letters and the shabby clothes of her babes.

No doctor is known to have entered that room. There, drearily alone, through the shortening November and December days, the heartsick, dying woman, would have lain and listened to her Rosalie's wails, or to customers in the shop below, or to Edgar pattering on the narrow stairs.¹

Nevertheless, there were visitors. Sometimes a Richmond gentlewoman, buying a hat from Mrs. Phillips, would mount to the sick-room and, not least assiduous among them, would be Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. Allan.

The end, however, was very near. On Elizabeth's behalf, a number of benefit performances were organised by Mr. Placide, appeals to patronise which appeared in the Richmond newspapers. The last is as follows:

TO THE HUMANE HEART

On this night, *Mrs. Poe*, lingering on the bed of disease and surrounded by her children, asks your assistance; and *asks it perhaps for the last time*. The generosity of a Richmond audience can need no other appeal. For particulars, see the Bills of the day.²

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 21–22.

² Reproduced from the *Richmond Enquirer*, Nov. 29, 1811. *Edgar Allan Poe Letters Till Now Unpublished*, p. 12. This work will henceforth be referred to as *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*.



POE'S MOTHER
(circa 1787-1811)
(from a miniature)

His Mother's Death

It was, indeed, for the last time for, on December 8th, 1811, Elizabeth Poe died of "pneumonia", aged twenty-four.

One pictures the small wax-like figure in death clad, doubtless, in an Empire gown, the best in Elizabeth's possession and lit, in the early December dusk, by candle ends stuck in bottles. Mrs. Phillips would be busy in the room, and Elizabeth's fellow-actors would follow each other to take a last leave of the dead woman. Mrs. Allan and Mrs. Mackenzie were also present: a tale of such misery had touched their husbands' hearts and they had agreed to bear the funeral expenses.

Next morning, December 9th, the little Edgar, then two years and eleven months old, was led home by Mrs. Allan, and Rosalie, aged barely a year, was taken by Mrs. Mackenzie. For sole inheritance, Rosalie received an empty jewel box, its trinkets long sold for food, while Edgar inherited the well-known miniature of his mother and her painting of the port of Boston, on the back of which she had enjoined him to: "Love Boston, the place of his birth, and where his mother found her best and most sympathetic friends".¹ This advice, however, he was never to heed! There was, in addition, a pocket-book with locks of her own and David Poe's hair, and a bundle of letters that will be important to us later.

Doubtless, Edgar was taken for a last look at his "sleeping" mother, a picture which was never to fade from his memory. Not, possibly, from the memory of consciousness, but from that other deeper memory which, unknown to us in ourselves, survives to form our natures and our fates. Similarly ineradicable were to prove Edgar's unconscious memories of his loved mother's long months of illness and decline. Such unconscious memories, though later buried by the amnesia which whelms our infantile experiences, are the most determinant of our lives.

Thus Elizabeth Arnold's diaphanous beauty and the mysterious malady by which she was slowly consumed, were later to be immortalised by her son's genius in the forms of Berenice, Morella, Madeline, Eleonora and Ligeia,² little though he might suspect whence they came.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 24.

² This connection has already been sensed by Harrison. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, pp. 5 and 9.)

CHAPTER III

Foster Parents

THE family into which the small Edgar was received consisted of John Allan, a Scotch merchant, his wife Frances, née Valentine, then twenty-five, and her elder sister, Anne Moore Valentine. In addition, there were the servants and negro slaves.

The Allan homestead, at the corner of *Fourteenth Street* and *Tobacco Alley*, was a spacious, solid, three-storied brick building of Georgian style, each story of three or four rooms and the whole topped by attics. It was an unostentatious but commodious dwelling.

Born at Irvine, Scotland, in 1780, John Allan had received a plain though sufficient education, of which he was later to remark that his foster son Edgar, at fifteen, had already had a better. Orphaned early, he had been brought to Virginia by an uncle, William Galt, a wealthy Scotch merchant with a considerable European and American trade in colonial produce and tobacco. Galt eventually died one of the richest men in Virginia.

Though John Allan began as clerk to his uncle, he soon entered into partnership with a fellow clerk, Charles Ellis, to start in business as carriers and shippers, the main profits of the firm, however, deriving from the export of tobacco. Doubtless both young men were backed by their respective uncles, William Galt and Josiah Ellis, the latter also a merchant of some size. The firm was designated Ellis and Allan: both partners were married.

The firm also traded in a wide range of other products: wheat, hay, maize, seed, tea, coffee, textiles, wines, liqueurs, horses and swine. It also sold slaves and hired them for work in the mines. To the planters it sold agricultural implements and, besides, sent whole vessel-loads across the Atlantic or on coast-wise trade. In war as in peace, the firm's goods and ships continued to ply the oceans.

These were the halcyon days of sail, a time when great schooners still

Foster Parents

swung up the yellow waters of the James River to anchor at Ellis and Allan's docks. The warm sunny air would be redolent of passing drays, piled high with tuns of tobacco. The magic of the sea, all the adventure of departing or arriving ships, still lingered in this ancient port in which Edgar was to reach maturity.

Despite its wide interests at this time, 1811, the firm was still young, and it is unlikely that John Allan had amassed any great wealth. Nor was his fortune such, that December, that given the general stagnation of trade, he could adopt another man's child without some serious thought on the matter. When Frances returned with the little orphan on the morrow of his mother's death, John Allan doubtless thought it the charitable impulse of a pitying heart, and must have hoped the child would not remain long under his roof.

He himself was but thirty-one and his wife twenty-five: they might still, therefore, hope for children. The idea of making this child his heir would hardly appeal to him. It also must have hurt this ambitious, class-conscious merchant's pride to know that the parents of such an heir were but "poor devils of actors". Doubtless, he already knew the rumours of Rosalie's illegitimacy. It need not therefore outrage or, even, surprise us to find John Allan later hesitant to adopt Edgar.

There were also personal reasons for this reluctance, since he already had at least two illegitimate offspring in Richmond: a daughter by a Miss Wills and a son by a Mrs. Collier, the latter boarded at this time with a local schoolmaster, William Richardson, whose fees John Allan paid.

Despite John Allan's initial opposition, however, it was Frances's wish that prevailed and Edgar was permitted to stay. Public opinion, too, to which he was highly susceptible, also helped this decision for, on December 26th, two weeks after Elizabeth's burial, the Richmond Theatre caught fire during a performance and destroyed seventy-three lives. After such a disaster it would have been difficult indeed for John Allan to rid himself of the child of one of Mr. Placide's actresses. Allan himself and his family had been spared, for they were away from Richmond at the time. But their contribution to the general measures to help the afflicted was to keep Edgar, and that of the Mackenzies to keep Rosalie.

CHAPTER IV

His Education Begins

Now two loving creatures had Edgar in their care: his "Ma" and his "Aunt Nancy". Also, as nursemaid, he had a black "mammy".

Though not ailing, he was a delicate child and the preoccupation of his "Ma". He preferred girls to boys and his affection for a small playmate, Catherine Elizabeth Potiaux, the pretty god-daughter of Frances Allan, began at this time. This was the first of Poe's "sister" loves of which we have record, leaving Rosalie aside. Mrs. Allan liked taking Edgar with her when she went calling, he in a black velvet suit and with dark curls that framed his pretty face and large, bright eyes. He would also be brought into the drawing room to recite, his talent then astonishing and delighting those present. Also, mounted on the table, he would pledge the guests in water and wine.

Mrs. Allan, a pious woman, often took him to church, and the Bible and religion thus became early familiar to him. But her husband's influence, too, must have made itself felt, rationalist as he was and reflecting the current spirit. It was doubtless the opinions then heard from John Allan which later helped to make Poe "one of the first poets in America to view the world minus the explanation of a miracle working deity."¹

Mrs. Allan's cousin, Edward Valentine was, at this time, a frequent visitor to the house. High-spirited and a great practical joker, he took at once to the boy and taught him many pranks, one being to pull the chair from under some unsuspecting victim. This new talent he unluckily practised, one day, on a worthy, imposing lady visitor, whereupon John Allan, it is said, seized him and bore him off to be whipped. Frances, it appears, hastened to her darling's cries and quieted his lamentations. John Allan was a firm believer in corporal punishment and whipped him whenever he misbehaved; no doubt, he would think, in Edgar's best

¹ *Israfel*, p. 54.



FRANCES KEELING ALLAN
1784-1829
(from a painting by Thomas Sully)
(Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia)

His Education Begins

interests. His wife and sister-in-law, he considered, were far too weak, too passive to bring up a boy. Nevertheless, the two women, helped by the servants, did all they could to protect the child from his "father's" wrath: as a result "with their connivance the boy soon learned to shield himself by means of petty subterfuges . . . doubtless more clever than manly".¹

Before he was six, Edgar was sent to a small Richmond school, rather like our kindergartens to-day. Later, before the Allans left for England, he attended a school for boys in the same town, the headmaster being a William Erwin. This school Edwin Collier, John Allan's illegitimate son, appears to have attended also. It is said that, at this time, Edgar was one of the rare children really interested in their lessons.

Nor must we omit, in this survey of the influences at work on the boy's soul, the tales of the sea brought to his foster-father's home by the skippers, merchants and adventurers who then thronged Richmond.

We must also remember the part played by the surrounding negroes in those slave-owning days in the South. Doubtless, he would often have visited the slaves' quarters on his guardian's estate with his black nurse and, possibly, even the negro part of the town. The strange songs and legends he would have heard! Dread tales of spectres and of the dead brought to life! The primitive imaginings of these negroes would awake an instant response in the child's mind, a mind already unconsciously, ineradicably, haunted by its unassuageable longing for a mother left dead, long ago, in a small room. Thus, that which already dwells in us, seeks out and absorbs, from the outer world, whatever will give it sustenance and power.

One summer, Edgar being about six, the Allans, returning from a holiday at Virginia Hot Springs, stopped *en route* at Staunton, Virginia, to visit the Valentines. There, Edward Valentine, Edgar's great friend, would take him driving or place Edgar behind him in the saddle. One day, Valentine relates, he took the child into a country post-office where Edgar greatly surprised the farmers by reading the newspaper aloud. On their return, the way led past a lone log-cabin surrounded by graves. Here, such terror seized the child that Valentine was forced to place him before him on the saddle. "They will run after us and drag me down!" screamed the boy.² This convulsive terror of death is worth noting, for

¹ *Israfel*, p. 57.

² *op. cit.*, p. 61.

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the first big repression of this precocious child's instinctual urges would then, doubtless, have been taking place, under the increasing pressure of his upbringing.

Dr. C. A. Ambler recalls that, at about this time, he would go swimming with Edgar in Shockoe Creek and that the very boy who, later, became so intrepid a swimmer, then showed great fear of the water.

CHAPTER V

Scotland and England

MEANWHILE, John Allan, as we see from his correspondence, was constantly urged by his sisters and brother-in-law to revisit his native Scotland, a plan which the Napoleonic wars had forced him to put off. The Peace of Ghent, however, having ended hostilities, the seas were again free and the Spring and Summer of 1815 were devoted to preparations for departure.

Important business reasons, also, necessitated this trip. The interruption of commerce between England and America had hit American tobacco dealers hard, and many accounts were still outstanding for deliveries prior to the war. These, it was urgent for him to collect, as also to renew his connections with English firms. Their stocks of tobacco were low and prices correspondingly high, but these were certain to drop so soon as relations were re-established and the export of accumulated tobacco resumed. He had, therefore, no time to lose, if he wished to open an English branch of his business.

John Allan must indeed have felt proud the day he set foot in England, that England which he had left an orphan. True, his fortune was not vast, but he already enjoyed considerable respect as the presumptive heir of his immensely wealthy uncle, William Galt: also, accompanying him were a young and lovely wife, a charming sister-in-law and a delightful child to testify to his philanthropy. For his foster-father was now attached to the child and seems to have really loved him, at least, between 1815 and 1820. This is borne out by all his correspondence at this time, with its frequent and even tender references to "little Edgar".

Since he planned to stay some time in England, John Allan auctioned his home before he left. Then, after a voyage of thirty-six days he and his family reached Liverpool on July 18th, 1815, from whence they proceeded to Irvine, Scotland.

Here, John Allan was in the bosom of his own family. One sister,

Mrs. Fowlds, lived with her children at Kilmarnock near by, while three other sisters, Eliza, Mary and Jane Allan, dwelt at Irvine, where also were many cousins and friends. The Galts themselves lived at Flowerbanks, thirty miles equidistant from Irvine and Kilmarnock. That same summer Edgar was sent to school at Irvine, a school already, doubtless, attended by several "cousins".

Thenceforth, the romantic charm of the Scotch countryside was ever to abide in his mind. Its misty landscapes, lingering dusks, fiery sunsets and "strange valleys",

" In the midst of which all day¹
The red sun-light lazily lay"

were all, later, to find expression in his works.

From Irvine, John Allan journeyed with his family to Glasgow and then Edinburgh. Edgar went too, thanks to his "Ma's" and Aunt Nancy's pleadings, although John Allan would rather have left him at school. They were accompanied by James Galt, a cousin, some nine years older than Edgar. It was Autumn before the border was crossed and October 7th, 1815, before the party reached London.

There the family remained but, towards the end of the year, Edgar, despite his pleas and the women's entreaties, was returned to school at Irvine in the company of James Galt.

Reft of his guardian angels, Edgar was most unhappy and seems to have planned to flee, either to London or America. This "fugue", at seven, is the first of the many such projects he subsequently contemplated and sometimes carried out.

The discipline at his school was mediævally harsh and doubtless included corporal punishment. Chapel was dreary and long. A usual writing exercise was the copying of epitaphs from the gravestones in the nearby cemetery. Edgar's recreations were few: occasional games with his schoolmates, rare visits to the Allan Fowlds or strolls in the haunted walk of Lord Kilmarnock's park where, it was said, the ghost of its one-time lady might sometimes be seen.

Edgar throve ill on exile and reclusion and Aunt Mary, her patience exhausted, finally returned him, early in 1816, to his foster-parents in London. There, he was sent as day-boy to a boarding-school kept by the Misses Dubourg, sisters to a clerk in Ellis and Allan's London office.

¹ Cf. *Israfel*, p. 69, where Hervey Allen quotes these lines from *The Valley of Unrest*. Cf. also *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 55.

Scotland and England

For some time Frances Allan had been ailing and now her health took a turn for the worse, due to some chronic internal illness to which we shall later revert, since Edgar's imaginings of its cause were to play their part in his relations with his foster-father. In August, 1817, she took a cure at a spa¹ and stayed on after her husband departed; a cure which appears to have been beneficial.

That same autumn, Edgar was sent as boarder to the Manor House School, Stoke Newington—then on the outskirts of London—its headmaster being the Rev. Mr. Bransby. In those days Stoke Newington still retained much of its ancient character and to Poe was "a misty village of Old England", as he later wrote.² Great elms lined its Roman road and it still numbered some Tudor houses. Not far from the village were the mansions of Lord Percy, Anne Boleyn's luckless lover, and of the Earl of Leicester, her daughter, Queen Elizabeth's, favourite. The school too, set in wide lawns and misty meadows, wore an ancient aspect. "At this moment", Poe was to write many years later, "I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep".³

Here it was, doubtless, that Edgar imbibed that romantic predilection for the medieval and neo-Gothic, for ancient dwellings and places which, later, he revealed in so many tales.

Contrary to the description in Poe's *William Wilson*, Mr. Bransby was neither "ancient", nor a "doctor". He was, in fact, thirty-three, of jovial disposition and a great sportsman, a man much loved by his pupils. He appears to have conceived a high opinion of Edgar, who was as devoted to sport as to study. Flashes of overweening pride soon, however, made Edgar insufferable to his school-fellows and it was, doubtless, this which mainly occasioned that sense of moral isolation of which he complains at this time.

In holidays, at Christmas and week-ends, Edgar went home to his foster-parents. Mrs. Allan, however, was often away, since her health continued unsatisfactory. But no doubt they sometimes went sight-seeing

¹ "*Chettingham*", according to *Israfel*, p. 75. Presumably Cheltenham, still used as a spa for rheumatism and digestive troubles.

² *William Wilson*.

³ *Ibid.*

to the Tower, Westminster Abbey and other places of interest. Edgar may also have seen the Elgin marbles at this time, then recently brought from Greece and much discussed in the Press. Meanwhile, John Allan's business affairs went ill and in March an attack of dropsy almost cost him his life. To complicate matters, considerable confusion arose owing to rival claims from his firm in Richmond. Burdened with debt, ill and discouraged, he withdrew Edgar from school and prepared to depart for America.

Late in June, 1820, he set sail with his family.

CHAPTER VI

The First Helen

JOHN ALLAN, with his family, reached New York on July 21st, 1820, and then moved on to Richmond. Their house being let, they first stayed with the Ellises.

In those days, Virginia's small capital numbered some twelve thousand souls. From the hill-tops, neo-classic churches and public edifices looked down on Georgian mansions set in wide gardens and lawns. At their feet stretched docks and warehouses in a criss-cross of sails, masts and flags. Mule-bells tinkled to the barges drawn through the canals. Boys swam in the river to the sound of plantation bells while conches called the slaves from the fields. Tobacco plants bent to the wind and fortune throve for the planter in the hot sun.

No factory-chimney then polluted the clear air and Richmond still nourished its aristocratic traditions: the best families prided themselves on their birth and lived in homes already ancient, full of menials and family portraits. Such was the environment in which Edgar was now to grow.¹

A garden full of lime trees and roses faced Mr. Ellis's home on *Second* and *Franklin Streets*, the scene of an idyll soon to take place. But the Allans did not stay long with the Ellises and in autumn moved to *Clay Street* and a new house.

A close friendship sprang up now between Edgar and his old acquaintance Ebenezer Burling. Edgar had met him first, when church-going with Frances Allan and, then, Ebenezer had taught him to swim. Now, with wild excitement, they read Robinson Crusoe together and shared his adventures. Or went sailing on the James River, memories of which are enshrined in the opening pages of *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 94.

At this time Edgar was an active, supple, well-built but thick-set youth, with remarkably large grey eyes, long lashes and dark, curly hair: a boy devoted to running, jumping and other sports in company with his friends Ebenezer Burling, Jack Mackenzie, Rob Sully and Bobby Stanard.

There was, however, another side to his character. Cheerful and companionable though he was, there were times when his friends found him uncommunicative, solitary, unapproachable. Then he would go off, alone, for long rambles: he loved to collect wild flowers, to spend his time day-dreaming or secretly to write and draw.

Soon after reaching Richmond, Edgar was sent to the English and Classical School kept by Joseph H. Clarke, formerly of Trinity College, Dublin. Clarke was an Irishman and fervent patriot, a keen latinist and also a kind, open-hearted man. Under his tuition, Edgar was to continue his French, Latin and mathematics, and acquaint himself with English literature.

Edgar's fees, though a mere annual sixty dollars, were never paid in one sum, a fact possibly indicative of John Allan's money difficulties. Also, the unsatisfactory results of his English visit had alienated both his partner, Charles Ellis and his prop and uncle, William Galt. By 1823, we find him with all his property mortgaged and greatly harassed by creditors. All this, doubtless, had its effect on his temperament and it is likely that both his wife and sister-in-law may, at times, have found it difficult to dispel the prevailing gloom, a state of affairs which no doubt also affected Edgar.

It was during this time that Edgar often spent nights with his friend, Ebenezer Burling, a practice greatly resented by John Allan.

We know, too, that Edgar was now fervently writing poetry, for his Richmond schoolfellows were to recall how he then shut himself up to scribble verses. The creative urge was already inspiring the lad to withdraw from his playmates' sports and pastimes.

Suspect as it everywhere is, nowhere was a poet's career more frowned upon then, than in America, with all its emphasis on material success. In those days a budding poet must have felt particularly isolated, surrounded by hostility and, in fact, driven to hide.

Poe himself tells us, as does Mr. Clarke that, at fourteen, he had already written his first poems. Mr. Clarke, indeed, recalls that while Edgar was at school, John Allan showed him a note-book containing some of the boy's poems. Only Frances Allan seems to have encouraged this trend.

The First Helen

During 1823 and 1824 Edgar was writing verses to a number of Richmond girls, and especially to pupils of Jane Mackenzie's boarding-school, the latter a sister of Rosalie's foster-parents. Rosalie, also a pupil at this school, served as messenger between Edgar and his sweethearts until the correspondence was discovered and stopped.

Rosalie seems to have greatly loved her brother. She was a pretty, well-disposed child, but seems to have stopped developing at twelve. Thereafter, she seems to have been more or less backward. This backwardness tended, of necessity, to separate her from her brother, than whom, according to contemporaries, there was "not a brighter, more graceful, or more attractive boy in the city".¹ The attractive boy, however, had not outgrown his madcap ways for, one evening, disguised as a ghost, he suddenly appeared at a card party at which General Scott was present. Another time he persuaded little Thomas Ellis to help him raid Judge Bushrod Washington's poultry yard: as a result, although fourteen, John Allan gave him a sound whipping.

We also learn from John Mackenzie that, at this period, Edgar had no affection for his guardian, who himself never failed to remind the boy of his dependent position.

This was the time Edgar performed his great feat of swimming from Ludlow's Wharf to Warwick up the James River, in spite of the strong current, much to the admiration of his friends who followed along the bank. Among these was little Robert Stanard, with whom a friendship sprang up, not uncommon between boys of different ages, the younger as it were, worshipping the elder.

Doubtless Robert often sang his friend's praises to his parents, Judge Robert Stanard and Jane Stith Stanard and, as a result, though unconsciously, played his part in literary history. For, one day, Rob took Edgar home to see his pigeons and rabbits and made him acquainted with his mother.

"Mrs. Stanard was in one of the front rooms standing by a window niche. The light falling upon her, caught in her dark ringlets crossed by a white snood, glowed in the classic folds of her gown, and flowed about her slenderly graceful figure."² Edgar heard her sweet voice thank him for his kindness to her boy, but hardly knew what she said and went home in a state of exaltation. Mrs. Stanard, his "Helen", was then twice his age.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 104.

² *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

Let us anticipate, here, what the second part of this study is to show: that, although Edgar's youthful infatuation for Catherine Elizabeth Potiaux and then for Rosalie's small schoolfellows, was cast in the mould of his childish love for his sister which, as it were, paved the way, there could be no powerful affection for him save as a repetition of the immense love he had originally felt for his mother, she whom he once saw sicken and die.¹ Nor would it seem that this was the only time that Edgar saw his "Helen", for it is said he read her his verses and that she encouraged his budding genius. Of what they spoke, while he sat in ecstasy at the feet of this ethereal, maternal presence, we cannot know, but there is no doubt that, for him, the repercussions of this meeting were tremendous.

Also, Poe seems to have elected for this first great passion a woman who, like his mother, was predestined to illness and early death. And indeed, soon after they met, Mrs. Stanard lost her reason and died.

In these tragic months, Edgar's temperament grew ever more sombre. He became morose and solitary and avoided his schoolmates. A barrier had arisen between him and his kind.

This was the time, too, when Frances Allan's health grew rapidly worse, due to the mysterious illness which was to end her life in the next two or three years.

Frances Allan, his foster-mother, was perhaps the woman he loved most. He now knew that it was to her, and his Aunt Nancy, that he owed his home with the Allans, little though his presence there pleased John Allan. Also, his foster-mother had, to an intense degree, the sort of beauty he adored, a beauty which enthralled both his heart and eyes.

Then too, there was her martyr's crown, for it was now that she seems to have learnt of her husband's mistresses and to have been much distressed. Edgar, too, must have known of their existence, for everything is known in a small town. His condemnation of this guilty "father", and the moral—and possibly even physical—sufferings of the "mother" he held so dear, doubtless intensified his animosity to the former and increased his love for the latter.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Stanard lay at death's door. Edgar, in deepening gloom, all but abandoned his friends and returned from school every day more taciturn.

¹ Of all Poe's biographers, only Joseph Wood Krutch, it seems to me, appears to have suspected this fact and the cardinal and fatal consequences which resulted therefrom for Poe. This we shall deal with later. (Joseph Wood Krutch, *Edgar Allan Poe, A Study in Genius*, London, Knopf, 1926.)

The First Helen

Mrs. Stanard died in April, 1824. We do not know whether Edgar was present at her funeral, but a legend says that he haunted her grave by night. He, himself, later, said so to a second "Helen". Yet, fact or fancy, tale or legend, its psychological significance is the same, for it expresses Poe's deepest trends, trends from which this legend issued—be it legend.

What is undoubted is that her death grieved him immensely, as his schoolmates noted at the time. And though the epitaph on her grave in Shockoe Cemetery is commonplace, that which was to go down to posterity is none other than this:

TO HELEN.¹

Helen, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicéan barks of yore,
That gently, o'er a perfumed sea,
The weary, way-worn wanderer bore
To his own native shore.

On desperate seas long wont to roam,
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Lo! in yon brilliant window-niche
How statue-like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!
Ah, Psyche, from the regions which
Are Holy-Land!

Possibly these lines contain a reminiscence of the Elgin marbles, which Edgar may have seen as a child, soon after reaching London. But another, far older memory, undoubtedly informs the poem. The *hyacinth* hair, the classic face, the Naiad airs which lead the poet "home", *gleam* with the light of that face and form—the mother's—which, though buried

¹ TO HELEN: 1831; *Southern Literary Messenger*, March, 1836; *Graham's Magazine*, September, 1841; *Philadelphia Saturday Museum*, March 4, 1843; 1845. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 171.) The text quoted, after *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 46, is that of 1845.

deep in the past, were ever to haunt Poe's life and work. Thus, our "wanderer", while still an adolescent, beginning his life's march, had already, in imagination, retreated "weary and way-worn" to his "native shore" and made that mournful return to the mother who, for him, would always be one who was dying or dead.

It was before he was twenty, that Poe was to write these lines, which express that special concept of love which characterised all his existence:

"I could not love except where Death
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath—".¹

This is more than a romantic effusion inspired by the literary fashions of Poe's time, for it expresses his inmost self and bears the imprint of his earliest memories.

Nevertheless, a trend such as this, as regards the mother, must inevitably bear its component of terror, for the ego would shrink in fear and dismay from an erotic fixation so fraught with horror. Edgar Allan Poe was a psychopath and not a pervert. But though the psychic traumata sustained in infancy determined a necrophilia in him, it was a necrophilia that was partly repressed and partly sublimated. In this fact we have the key to his psycho-neurosis, character, life and work. It also explains the re-irruption of anxiety which apparently occurred just when, for the second time in his life, he had abandoned himself, with morose delectation, to an ecstasy of grief and love for a dead woman. But it was only imaginatively that Poe was to disinter the dead or pseudo-dead; in effect, the promptings of his mind filled him with terror. With reason, he feared both himself and his desires, which were projected as such hideous and nightmarish forms that, on awaking, he would bury his head beneath the blankets in his effort to escape. During these nights of his adolescence, as culminating horror, he would imagine an icy corpse-like hand being laid on his face.²

¹ *Preface*, 1829; *Introduction*, 1831. (Earlier versions of *Romance*, 1843-1845, in which the lines were finally suppressed by Poe himself.) (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 164.)

² *Israfel*, pp. 118-119, quoting John Mackenzie.

CHAPTER VII

Lafayette's Visit and William Galt's Legacy

DURING the autumn of 1824, the aged Lafayette revisited America. Long honoured as a foe to tyrants, a great soldier and George Washington's friend, as also one who illustrated Jefferson's triumph and the philosophy of Rousseau, the preparations to honour him were on a grand scale.

The State of Virginia had particular reason to be grateful and his campaign against Arnold and prowess at Yorktown were still remembered. Thus, it was only natural that especial emphasis should be laid on the military honours to be accorded him, honours in which the State Militia were to join.

A guard being needed, however, to protect the city—there was always the idea of a possible rebellion of the blacks—many of the young men organised themselves into a volunteer corps known as the "Richmond Junior Volunteers" or "Junior Morgan Riflemen", among which make-shift warriors Mr. Burke's pupils (he having succeeded Mr. Clarke) were notable for enthusiasm. For captain, the corps elected John Lyle and for lieutenant, Edgar Allan Poe.

Having made arrangements to guard the city during the absence of the regulars, they being detailed to escort Lafayette to Richmond, the remaining Morgan Riflemen, including Lieut. Poe, also marched out to meet their illustrious visitor.

Lafayette, wearing a cocked hat and knee breeches, left the train at Norfolk, where he was greeted with vast acclaim. Many of the veterans of the Revolution had gathered to meet him and among them were the cadets commanded by Poe.

Edgar, the grandson of "General" David Poe, would surely have been noticed. Had not Lafayette but lately proclaimed: "Here rests a noble heart" over the "General's" grave at Baltimore?

This tribute must have helped to turn the young man's thoughts to

arms and reactivated his doubtless old identification with that illustrious forebear. Besides, his enrolment in the Richmond Junior Volunteers and his lieutenant's rank would, for the first time, have made him feel independent and that, at last, he had reached man's estate.

From this time Edgar appears to have been especially impatient of any control by John Allan. It was then he seems to have rebelled against his whippings, to have answered him disrespectfully and to have sulked for hours. In November, 1824, John Allan, for his part, in a now famous letter written to Henry Poe, then at Baltimore, accuses Edgar of ingratitude and speaks of Rosalie as their "half-sister". On the back of this letter, also in his hand, is a computation, at compound interest, of sundry amounts.¹

In March, 1825, William Galt died and left most of his fortune to John Allan. Small legacies, however, were bequeathed to other members of the Allan and Galt clans and distant connections in Scotland. Poe later declared that the sum John Allan inherited was \$750,000. Whether this was so we cannot now say, but he had certainly entered into possession of a considerable fortune in money, goods, property, bonds and slaves.

The house on *Fourteenth Street* and *Tobacco Alley* to which the Allans had returned, no longer sufficed his social ambitions, given the style in which he thenceforth wished to live. And though his wife's health declined steadily, he was bent on intimidating those who said "So Galt has left all his money to old swell-foot Allan!"², in reference to his gout. Soon, therefore, on June 28th, 1825, he purchased at auction a large house, at the South corner of *Main* and *Fifth Streets*, for \$14,950.

Gardens surrounded the house on two sides: to the east a kitchen garden and, sloping south, a garden with grapes, figs, raspberries and a profusion of flowering bushes.

From the windows, there was a wide, romantic view of the James River valley merging into the distant horizon. Its accommodation was a spacious hall, dining room, morning reception room and tea room on the ground floor and, above, another and larger parlour or ballroom, the master's and ladies' bedrooms, a guest room and Edgar's.

This last was placed at the end of a turn of the hall landing, beyond a dark twist of the stairs. In this recess, an *agate lamp* was kept constantly burning. Two windows, facing north and east, gave light to the room; the view from them being extensive. The usual bedroom furniture was

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 125-126.

² *op. cit.*, p. 116.



JOHN ALLAN'S HOUSE, RICHMOND
(from a photograph)

Lafayette's Visit and William Galt's Legacy

amplified by a couch on which he loved to lie and read. His wardrobe was well supplied and there was a shelf for his books.

We may form some conjecture of the works aligned there: Homer, Virgil, Cicero, Cæsar, Horace, English and French grammars, English and American history, "Gothic" novels and a manual or two on military tactics. Byron, Moore, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and possibly Shelley would be included and those eighteenth-century poets so frequent then on Southern bookshelves. There would also be *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas* and *Joe Miller*, of which we shall again hear, as well as Milton, Burns, Campbell, Kirke White and doubtless E. C. Pinckney.

Among novelists, Scott, Cooper and Charles Brockden Brown would have been known to Poe, as also Washington Irving's first publications. He would have been familiar, too, with Macaulay and other essayists and have seen most contemporary reviews. The *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *London Critical Review of Annals of Literature* and the *London Ladies' Magazine* were all available in Ellis and Allan's offices. Moore, Byron and Goldsmith seem especially to have interested him.

The new house was tastefully furnished by Frances Allan in Empire style and contained busts of Dante and Mary Magdalen by Canova. On Edgar's desk there was a bronze inkstand and sand-castor bought by John Allan and engraved with his name. These Edgar was to take with him when, at last, he left home.

The house also had an upper porch furnished with a swing, as well as a telescope through which he and his young friends often observed the stars. There Edgar, who had developed a passion for astronomy, would spend long hours watching the dead face of the moon.

CHAPTER VIII

Elmira

WHERE *Second* and *Franklin Streets* met, and opposite the home of Charles Ellis with whom the Allans had stayed when they returned from England, a magic garden then stood. On it, Jefferson had once thought to build a model prison, embodying his ideas of prison reform. But a different spot had been chosen and the old garden, tended by Charles Ellis's gardener, had become a bower of roses, honeysuckle, jasmine and myrtle, thronged with birds.

There children would play and old men sit in the sun, and there the young Edgar dreamt his dreams. There too, he brought Sarah Elmira Royster, to tell her his love.

Elmira's parents were neighbours and acquainted with both the Ellises and Allans. She, herself, was then about fifteen with great, black eyes and dark, clustering curls which shadowed her face. Poe had probably known her since 1823 but in 1824 they were close friends. During his "Helen's" last days, these walks with his "Myra" must greatly have comforted the unhappy boy. Of all his "sister-loves", that for Elmira was to prove most enduring.¹

Neither John Allan nor Mr. Royster seem to have lent a favourable eye to the affection that drew the two youngsters together.

Meanwhile, his legacy from William Galt had wrought a change in John Allan's plans for Edgar's future. So far, he seems to have thought of taking him into his firm, but now, given Edgar's intellectual promise,

¹ That Elmira was one of Poe's successive "sisters" we find indirectly confirmed by Poe himself. In *The Pirate*, a tale of adventure which Henry and Edgar published together in issue No. 24 of the *Baltimore North American* (Vol. 1, October 27th, 1827, p. 189), the plot is directly based on the sad story of Edgar's love for Elmira. The heroine bears the name of Rosalie, Poe's sister. (Cf. *Poe's Brother*, by Hervey Allen and Thomas Ollive Mabbott, New York, George H. Doran Co., 1926, pps. 53 ff.)



After an original.
Sketch by Poe.

After a pencil sketch of Sarah Elmira Royster
By Edgar Allan Poe. From the collection of
Charles H. Burney of Richmond, Va., and coming
direct from Mrs. S. E. Shelton.

SARAH ELMIRA ROYSTER AT 16
(from a drawing by Poe, Richmond, 1826)
(Poe Shrine, Richmond, Virginia)

he dreamt of fitting him for the law. He therefore, in March, 1825, withdrew Edgar from Mr. Burke's school and had him privately tutored to send him, as soon as possible, to the University of Virginia.

In *The Literary Life of Thingum Bob*, Poe has left us a satirical and transparent picture of his attitude, at this time, to John Allan, the firm, and his own literary aspirations.¹ From his father, as sole provision in life, Thingum receives a garret, pen, ink, paper and rhyming dictionary, together with a copy of a satirical review entitled *The Gad-Fly*. For this handsome settlement, Thingum is expected to show immense gratitude. "Your generosity is boundless", he responds, and "I shall repay you by making you the father of a genius." No more eloquent testimony to the relations between Edgar and his foster-father could be found.

For it was round this money-motif that the deep animosity between "father" and "son", which had developed concurrently with Edgar's growth, was soon to find expression.

Forceful and domineering in everyday matters, John Allan could have no sympathy for the budding poetical genius of his foster-son. But there were yet deeper roots to their mutual animosity which derived from the rivalry between them; the one, the husband of Frances Allan; the other, her grown-up "son". While he was little, Edgar could often charm and soften John Allan but now, a man, all their latent rivalry exploded—their Œdipal rivalry, as we should say.

By this time, too, Frances Allan knew that her husband was unfaithful, a knowledge doubtless acquired after her return from England and before Lafayette's visit. Also, in his possession, John Allan had the letters his mother had left Edgar, letters which doubtless threw light on Rosalie's birth and which, at Edgar's wish, were piously burnt by Mrs. Clemm after his death.² John Allan, we imagine, would hardly scruple to attack Edgar's mother in his presence, nor he to find effective retorts: all of which would inflame their deep mutual rivalry.

About this time, William Henry Leonard Poe appears to have come to Richmond on a visit to his brother. He was then a sailor, probably in the Merchant Marine. Delicate in health and, doubtless already tubercular he, too, wrote poetry and had literary tastes. One of his poems,³

¹ *The Literary Life of Thingum Bob: Southern Literary Messenger*, December, 1844; *Broadway Journal*, No. 2, p. 3.

² For the history of these letters, cf. *Israfel*, pp. 13, 24, 141, and 727.

³ *For the North American. In a Pocket Book . . .*, lines published at Baltimore in 1827. (Cf. *Poe's Brother*, p. 41: op. cit., page 26, note 1.)

addressed to Rosalie, seems to cast doubt on her legitimacy, possibly as the result of a letter sent him by John Allan, in which this was insinuated.

Meanwhile, Edgar, increasingly hostile to his foster-father, appears to have begun openly to regret that he had not been adopted by Mrs. Mackenzie, whom he would often call "Ma", as he did Frances Allan. Doubtless, such exclamations would reach John Allan. Edgar, too, now frequently complained to the Mackenzies of his foster-father and would talk of "running away to sea". As for John Allan, he now complained bitterly of Edgar's ingratitude to him.

Since the Allans moved in the best Richmond society, Edgar went everywhere, now his school days were done. That society was a school of politeness and manners and, to it, Poe owed that air of breeding and distinction which struck all who met him later. It was generally supposed that Edgar would succeed to John Allan's fortune and many a mother, doubtless, encouraged her daughter in his pursuit.

Edgar, however, had eyes for none but Elmira. Many were the hours he spent playing the flute at her home, while she accompanied him on the piano. Or else Edgar, with his clear tenor voice, would join her in duets. The young lover also drew his sweetheart's portrait and thus we still know how she looked. Indeed, they had reached a point where, before he left for the University, Elmira had promised to be his wife.

That departure was close at hand. John Allan was delighted that the boy would be gone, but his wife suffered all too keenly. She accompanied him as far as Charlottesville and their parting was very sad.

The old coachman who drove Mrs. Allan back to Richmond also bore a letter from Edgar to Elmira.



THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA IN POE'S TIME LOOKING WEST
(from an old print)

CHAPTER IX

At the University of Virginia

THOMAS JEFFERSON, that political dreamer and romantic, brought at least one great scheme to completion: the founding of an "Oxford of the New World". This he did at Charlottesville, Virginia, not far from his own home at Monticello. On March 7th, 1825, the University of Virginia received its first fifty students. And in February, 1826, among them, appears the illustrious name of Poe.

Jefferson had his own ideas as to the way his university should be run; ideas far in advance of his time and, in certain respects, too idealistic. He believed, in fact, that human nature was fundamentally good, as was fashionable at the time and, on this principle, therefore, drew up the university's statutes.

Studies were in charge of eight excellent scholars, six being "foreign-born"¹, *i.e.*, mostly Englishmen. George Tucker, first Chairman of the Faculty of Moral Philosophy and most distinguished of them was, however, American and later distinguished himself as historian, essayist, economist and Jefferson's biographer. The syllabus was somewhat too advanced for the average student, though not for Poe.

A number of innovations, daring at the time, characterised the new university as, for instance, the study of modern languages, the formal teaching of which Jefferson first introduced into America when Governor of Virginia. Other features were workshops for practical training, optional training in military drill and the encouragement of vaccination by making it gratis. Church was not obligatory.

Also, in consonance with its founder's ideas, the university functioned democratically. Entire liberty was left the students, though they were subject to civil law. Anarchy therefore prevailed and the peace of the university and countryside was only too often disturbed by the riotousness of the students. They gambled, fought duels, got into debt and attended

¹ *Israfel*, p. 149.

local festivities for miles around. Such were the conditions which prevailed when Poe reached Charlottesville.

From his room, both study and bedroom, he had a distant view of the Ragged Mountains. In winter, a small fireplace provided a little warmth. There were no baths.

At five-thirty each morning the students were called. They would wash in haste, then breakfast at a near-by boarding-house and return to begin their studies. Poe stood high in French and Latin, but never mastered either completely. His Greek was average and his Italian better. Yet, such was his facility that he could prepare his lessons in a few moments and thus "win for himself the admiration, but more often the envy, of his fellow-students".¹

Here, Edgar volunteered for the course in military drill conducted by one Mathews, a West Point graduate. Doubtless his grandfather's exploits had something to do with this choice, as also his recent lieutenancy in the Richmond Junior Volunteers.

Afternoons, when the college-men were free, were spent in the library, at shops or in hostelrys at Charlottesville, a bare mile away. In summer, they would swim in the yellow Rivanna or take long walks in the Ragged Mountains.

Often, Poe borrowed books from the library: books mainly on history and natural history. Jefferson, who often visited the place, he might well have seen, but we have no record that any impression was left upon Poe.

Until recently, all that was known of Poe's university career was what might be culled from accounts left by his fellow-students. Since publication, however, of his letters to John Allan, letters of inestimable worth to his biographers, we have his own evidence in regard to this time.²

Poe there describes the riotous life of the students to his foster-father. In one letter, he relates how a number fled to the woods and mountains to escape the Sheriff's enquiries into breaches of the gaming laws. In others, he tells of the fighting among the students, of the blows and insults exchanged and of how a certain Wickliffe, from Kentucky, in a fight, so bit his opponent's arm from shoulder to elbow, that it was "likely that pieces of flesh as large as" Poe's "hand would be obliged to be cut out".³ Such were the manners and customs in this university at the time.

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. I, p. 41.

² *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*. Letters 1 and 2. (cf. page 1, note 1), References to my own book will be indicated by "page", instead of by the abbreviation "p."

³ *op. cit.*, p. 44.

At the University of Virginia

Drinking also prevailed in the local hotels and boarding-houses, a favorite alcoholic mixture being "peach and honey", and a certain amount of woman-chasing went on. Poe, however, seems only to have paid some slight attention to the daughter of a boarding-house keeper.

What absorbed him was cards. To cover his losses he would sell his clothes, or pay with orders on his tailor. Meanwhile, his debts went on increasing, since he received but trifling amounts from the now wealthy John Allan.

While most of his fellow-collegers had handsome allowances, Edgar was in far different case. Whether deliberately, or through increasing miserliness, or because John Allan's waning affection for his ward expressed itself by withdrawing support, the fact remains that when Edgar departed for the university he was only provided with \$110, whereas his minimum annual expense would be \$350, a sum which did not even include the \$149 needed to pay for his room, bed, blankets, etc. Thus Poe was forced to endure the humiliation of being considered little more than a beggar by the more fortunate students, although "son" to one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. This, he was never to forgive and we shall see how, from this time on, the money-motif became the deepest expression of the hostility between this "father" and "son".

Poe, faced with finding the wherewithal to pay for his servant and fuel, his washing and other expenses, tells us he gambled to gain what he lacked. All that happened, however, was that his gambling and tradesmen's debts continued to mount up. Meanwhile, the tradesmen well knew how to turn the students' difficulties to account, since they relied on the parents to settle such debts, despite the law which declared them invalid.

Edgar had still other reasons for wretchedness in that Elmira no longer replied to his letters. Mr. Royster had, in fact, intercepted their correspondence and, probably in agreement with John Allan who, doubtless, no longer considered Edgar his heir, urged her to marry the wealthy Mr. Shelton, a far more socially desirable husband than Edgar. Heart-broken by the silence of her lover Elmira, at last, consented.

A dark cloud descended on Edgar. Then it was that, penniless, jilted and seventeen, he first took to drink.

One of his classmates, Thomas G. Tucker, has described how he drank.

"He would always seize the tempting glass, generally unmixed with sugar or water—in fact, perfectly straight—and without the least apparent pleasure, swallow the contents, never pausing until the last drop had passed his lips. One glass at a time was all that he could take;

but this was sufficient to rouse his whole nervous nature into a state of strongest excitement, which found vent in a continuous flow of wild, fascinating talk that irresistibly enchanted every listener with siren-like power."¹

Poe's "orgies" were held in his room, warmed by a blazing fire and fed, at times, with the students' furniture. Gambling excited him intensely and he then drank, as described: "en barbare", as Baudelaire wrote later.

Gambling, however, was not his sole occupation. He read Shelley, Keats, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Moore, and began the writing of *Tamerlane*, inspired by Elmira. At times, too, in his room, he would read his compositions to his friends, or from his favourite poets.

One such occasion was followed by the destruction of a humorous tale, *Gaffy*, which they had harshly criticised in jest, whereupon Poe cast it into the fire. Only the title survives, for that became Poe's nickname to his cronies.

Jefferson died on July 4th, 1826, an event which doubtless called forth many a university oration. Far more serious however, for Poe, was John Allan's furious descent on Charlottesville that autumn, in response to the general clamour from Edgar's purveyors. Doubtless their meeting was stormy. The former saw danger to his sacred money-bags, and the latter resented the miserliness that did not even allow him enough to pay his cleaner. Though the quarrel was about money, it was the expression, in fact, of their utterly different natures.

In the upshot, the great merchant, rich though he was, refused to pay Edgar's gambling debts or any others, although \$2,000 or \$2,500 would have saved him and permitted him to continue his studies. Instead, John Allan chose to have him removed, although at the cost of his education and future prospects. Doubtless he no longer believed in any improvement in Edgar, and conveniently forgot that it was he who had left him without money or help. But strongest motive of all was the fact that he no longer loved Edgar, so that all his old hostility, masked for a time by affection, now burst unmistakably forth.

Thus, on December 21st, 1826, Edgar, by stage-coach, returned to Richmond.

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 40.



JOHN ALLAN
1780-1834
(from a portrait, painter unknown)
(Pos Shrine, Richmond, Virginia)

CHAPTER X

Poe Breaks with John Allan

BACK in Richmond, although his reception from John Allan was frigid, no one could have been kinder or more commiserate than his "Ma", and his Aunt Nancy. Indeed, Mrs. Allan had already arranged a Christmas party for him and invited his friends. Perhaps she had hoped to reconcile him to his home for, had he not, that February, as they drove to the university together, said that he longed to leave the home of John Allan and make his own way in the world? But, long before the party was over, Edgar had retired to a tavern, to drink with a friend. Doubtless, it was Elmira's absence which thus drove him to drink, wretched and humbled as he felt with his university career in ashes. She, at least, would have comforted him! But when, immediately he returned, he had hurried to her home, all he learnt at the door was that she had left Richmond. Perhaps he then guessed the truth; that John Allan, in connivance with Mr. Royster, had stopped their letters and perhaps, even, had opened and read them. Thus Elmira, imagining herself forgotten, had agreed to listen to Mr. Shelton. Now she was out of his reach, pending her marriage to the latter.

Life at home must have become more and more intolerable to him. Not only did John Allan refuse to settle his debts, and so make it possible for him to return to the university, but he refused even to take Edgar's resolution to study law seriously.

Meanwhile, Edgar's attitude, since his return, had done little to calm John Allan's exasperation. Was it not Edgar's boast that he had only got into debt to see how much of the "old gentleman's" money he could get through? John Allan's response was to leave him penniless and do nothing to help him find work, while taunting him with "eating the bread of idleness". With all these irritations and even the rudeness of the black slaves, Edgar might well feel his position hopeless.

Edgar, himself, now made efforts to find a post, but his letter to the

Mills Nursery Co., a Philadelphia firm which traded with Ellis and Allan, was referred back to John Allan. This only infuriated the latter, for it revealed that his ward meant to quit his roof without his authority. All John Allan's conduct at this time, however, seems to have had only one object: that of forcing Edgar to leave.

According to the latest documents revealed, it would appear that what caused the final break between the two men was a quarrel, after dinner, on March 18th, 1827.¹

That evening, John Allan must have brought out Poe's letter and asked whether, in fact, he intended leaving Richmond or would stay to work and pay off his debts. Poe's reply, doubtless, was a bitter indictment of John Allan's parsimony. This, John Allan would justify by Edgar's extravagance and gambling debts. Poe then again asked that his just debts be paid and for the rest, he would manage somehow! Had not his conduct, during his last three months at the university, been exemplary, (subsequent to John Allan's visit), and had he not made excellent progress? The latter, however, refused to yield. Instead, he suggested that Edgar continue his classical, French and mathematical studies at home. He evidently had ideas of a liberal profession for Edgar. But the latter's heart was set on the university and a literary career. Even then he was working on his poems. To John Allan, this "scribbling" seemed laziness and pure waste of time and now, on this fateful evening, he presented the following ultimatum to Edgar: either he stayed and accepted John Allan's decisions or quitted the house for ever. He gave him the night to think it over.

So it was, on this night of March 18th, 1827, that Poe made the most important decision of his life and resolved not to submit to John Allan, but to go his own way. Some "ingratitude" there doubtless was in this decision and in leaving his seriously ill "Ma". But, rash as it was, the choice was brave and implicit with faith in his own genius. For this he was sacrificing comfort and fortune in exchange for certain distress.

We must not forget, however, that a strong unconscious motive must have influenced his decision. Once before, the safety and prestige of the father's house had been exchanged for a vagabond existence, when his own father, David Poe, left home. That father, alas, for Edgar, was in many ways destined to remain the original with whom, unconsciously, he identified himself. As his father had once left home to answer the call of the stage, so Edgar fled now at the call of another art though ignorant,

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 3.

Poe Breaks with John Allan

surely, of the distant command he was thus obeying. Unconscious commands, however, are the most imperative.

At breakfast, next morning, Poe gave his reply to John Allan. He once more said what he thought of his miserliness and how impossible that made it, for him, to return to his studies. Immense was the rage of John Allan and fierce his reproaches as he banged his stick on the floor. Followed bitter and searching insults, overheard in trembling horror by Mrs. Allan and Aunt Nancy, to whom Edgar was still their dear "son". John Allan ended by crying that all that remained for Edgar was to learn to starve and ordered him out of his house. Edgar, waiting for no reminder, left at once, with only the clothes on his back.

His first refuge, characteristically, was the *Court House Tavern*, from which he wrote to John Allan recounting his many grievances.¹ Why, he asks, had John Allan inspired him with ambition, if but to blast his possibilities of success by cutting him off from the university? He also tells him he has overheard him say he had no affection for himself, Edgar. Why, again, had he continually upbraided him with eating the bread of idleness, when he could have remedied the evil by placing him to some business? Then, too, John Allan took delight in exposing him to the whims and caprices of others and to the complete authority of the black servants. In conclusion, he requests that his trunk, containing his clothes and books, be sent him—if John Allan still retains the least affection—together with sufficient money to pay his fare to a Northern city. He trembles what the consequences may be, if John Allan fails to comply with his request.

Poe was already experiencing hunger but would rather have died than return.

Next morning, no answer having reached him, Edgar again wrote to John Allan. He now asks for his trunk and clothes and adds that, doubtless, his first letter has not reached him or he would have received them before. He also describes his precarious position, having eaten nothing since the preceding morning and having nowhere to spend the night: he is nearly exhausted with roaming the streets. He begs him to send his trunk and clothes, with enough to pay his passage (\$12) to Boston, if he does not wish his prophecy realised that Edgar will starve to death. Perhaps he would lend him the money, if he will not give it. He sends his love to all at home, and in a P.S. adds "I have not one cent in the world to provide any food".²

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 3.

² *op. cit.*, Letter 4.

John Allan sent neither trunk nor money but a letter in reply to Edgar's first missive; a letter that was cold but showed no anger.¹ He says he is not surprised at anything Edgar may say or do, and reminds him how much solicitude and care went to his upbringing and education. True, he had taught him to aspire to eminence in public life, but he "never expected that *Don Quixotte*, *Gil Blas*, *Jos. Miller* and such works were calculated to promote the end". (Clearly, their literary tastes were at odds and we further learn that John Allan detested Byron.) He also rebuts Poe's other charges by claiming that his severity was but to correct Edgar's faults and to urge him to perfect himself in mathematics, languages, etc. If Poe's Heart be not of Marble, it will tell him whether his foster-father had not good reason to fear for him. The world will judge whether his grievances are justified. And he concludes with the taunt: "you tremble for the consequences unless I send you a supply of money".

Since neither trunk nor money reached him, Poe sought refuge at *Richardson's Tavern*, where his friend, Ebenezer Burling had some credit. There, the negro slave, Dab, brought him some things and a little money from his "Ma" and his Aunt Nancy. Doubtless his manuscripts were restored in the same way. Edgar also charged Dab to deliver some missives to a young lady in the neighbourhood whom he admired.

Meanwhile, Frances Allan and Aunt Nancy persuaded John Allan to use his influence with the Richmond ship's captains to ensure that Edgar did not go to sea, hoping that, by thus retaining him, the two men might be reconciled some day. Finally, in order to leave and throw off his creditors, Edgar took passage from Norfolk under the name of Henri Le Rennét. Burling, his friend, intoxicated, accompanied him to the ship and on his return related that Edgar was sailing to foreign parts.² His destination, however, was only Boston, which he reached in a coaling vessel. The later legend that Poe, at this time, went to Greece, Russia, France and London and encountered many adventures, as he himself wrote in an autobiographical note, which many, besides Baudelaire credited, is thus shown to be unfounded.

Doubtless, Poe was drawn to Boston, where he was born, the city which his mother, before she died, urged him to love, by a sort of summons out of the past and the innermost depths of his being. It was as though, leaving one mother, he now returned to his first, dead mother.

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 5.

² Burling, a weak and dissolute youth, was to die of cholera a few years later.

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In Boston he discovered a jobbing printer, Calvin Thomas, about his own age, by whom his first book was printed: *Tamerlane and Other Poems* By a Bostonian, Boston, 1827.

In the poem which gives the book its name, Poe limns himself in the form of the conquering "shepherd's son", with his love for Ada-Elmira, and his ambition. Yet, when he returns to Samarcand—not Richmond—to lay his conquered world at her feet, it is to find his Ada dead—not plighted to another.

Thus his own predilections fully corresponded to the spirit of his time.

The first version of *Tamerlane*, that of 1827, is much the most spontaneous. For all its Byronism, it still vibrates with the throes of intense emotional experience which seems all but extinguished in the final, over-polished version of 1845.

The other poems in the volume are all melancholy in cast,¹ for which the romantic spirit of the age may be held responsible. Two, however, are especially funereal and already characteristic, namely, *Spirits of the Dead* and *The Lake*. The former, it is thought, was written on the death of Mrs. Stanard, but clearly echoes another and earlier loss. The latter expresses thoughts of self-destruction in that dismal lake he here depicts for the first time and was to limn so often after, as though enamoured of its dark, miasmatic waters. For Poe, this lake would seem to have been the symbol of his dead mother which lured him on and beckoned him to return and once more merge in her.

It has been remarked² that though, from the Ragged Mountains in the vicinity of Charlottesville, Poe might have derived most of his mountain and forest landscapes, we know of no origin for these "lakes"; doubtless because this feature of nature, more than any other, was the direct creation of his soul, its symbols and his past. Derive his visions of nature where he might, always the unifying symbolism in his soul would synthesise and bring them to evoke those dismal, stagnant waters, that funereal lake, which symbolised the lost and always sought-for mother with whom his necrophilist soul forever longed to reunite.

But all these poems, conceived between 1821 and 1827, some therefore before even the great shock of his "Helen's" death, and the faithlessness

¹ 1827: *Tamerlane*; To — — (I saw thee on thy bridal day—); *Dreams*; *Spirits of the Dead*; *Evening Star*; *A Dream within a Dream*; *Stanzas*; *A Dream*; "The Happiest Day, the Happiest Hour"; *The Lake*; To — (Virginia Edition, Vol. 7.)

² Charles W. Kent, (op, cit., p. XXIX).

of his Elmira, are aspected on a paradisaal past, lost in a haze of mystery which he would never recapture. Already, over them all, there seems to hover the Raven's despairing "Nevermore".

"The happiest day—the happiest hour
Mine eyes shall see . . .
..... have been:"¹

What day and what hour? That when the adolescent dreamed his dreams by Elmira's side in the garden? That when he read his poems at the feet of his "Helen"? Or those, remoter yet, when with his mother, the dazzling embodiment, in her stage finery, of many a *heroine of the past*, he had watched the beloved, wonderful creature sicken and die while growing ever more ethereal and like the disease-tainted sylphs round whom he would weave his tales.

The cost of printing his book and providing food and lodging—we do not know where he lived at this epoch—had now exhausted the slender provision he owed to his "Ma" and Aunt Nancy. Thereupon Edgar, the grandson of "General" Poe, and one-time lieutenant in the Richmond Junior Volunteers, enlisted on May 26th, 1827, in the U.S. Forces, under the name of Edgar A. Perry. Though but eighteen, his age was given as twenty-two. The records describe him as five foot eight, with grey eyes, brown hair and fair complexion. He was at once assigned to Battery "H" of the First Artillery, stationed at Fort Independence, Boston Harbour.²

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 20.

² The legend of Poe's travels abroad was finally disposed of by Woodberry, who provided documentary proof of Poe's enlistment.

CHAPTER XI

Army Life

ARMY life doubtless held many hardships for one both a dreamer and poet but, given the obstacles to his making a position in civil life, he owed it to the U.S. Forces and its material provision that he did not share Chatterton's fate nor starve to death in a Boston garret.

Poe remained at Fort Independence from late May, 1827, to late October, mostly serving as company clerk and assistant in the commissariat department for which he was very well fitted, given his education and business experience acquired with Ellis and Allan.

Here, his conduct seems to have been exemplary, as witness his subsequent promotion and Lieut. Howard's testimonial that his habits were good "and entirely free from drinking". Probably few enlisted men, at the time, would have deserved as much.

Then, on October 31st, 1827, Poe's battery was ordered to Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island, lying at the mouth of Charleston Harbour, South Carolina.

In those days, troops went by water from Boston and the journey by sail took three to four weeks, the transports standing well out to sea to avoid the dangerous coastline. Thus, it was November before Poe, with his battery, found himself before the low-lying shores of South Carolina, anchor having been cast under the very walls of Fort Moultrie.

Poe has himself described this island at the beginning of his story, *The Gold Bug*, as it must have impressed him at this time:

"This Island is a very singular one. It consists of little else than the sea sand, and is about three miles long. Its breadth at no point exceeds a quarter of a mile. It is separated from the main land by a scarcely perceptible creek, oozing its way through a wilderness of reeds and slime, a favourite resort of the marsh-hen. The vegetation, as might be supposed, is scant, or at least dwarfish. No trees of any magnitude are to be seen. Near the western extremity, where Fort Moultrie stands, and where are some miserable frame buildings, tenanted, during

summer, by the fugitives from Charleston dust and fever, may be found, indeed, the bristly palmetto; but the whole island, with the exception of this western point, and a line of hard, white beach on the seacoast, is covered with a dense undergrowth of the sweet myrtle, so much prized by the horticulturalists of England. The shrub here often attains the height of fifteen or twenty feet, and forms an almost impenetrable coppice, burdening the air with its fragrance."

At the harbour mouth, facing Fort Moultrie, stood Fort Sumter, while inland the shore was dotted with the houses and steeples of Charleston, a port then frequented by every sea-going nation of the world.

To the north and east of the barracks stretched the illimitable long low beaches of Sullivan's Island, divided by a narrow inlet from the Isle of Palms, of similar aspect. The young soldier had but to walk out of barracks—and doubtless his peace-time service left him abundant leisure—to find himself on beaches laved by the warm sea.

Inland, the low range of sand dunes, thick with palmetto and sweet-scented myrtle, was thronged with great butterflies and strange beetles while, on warm moon-lit nights, giant sea-turtles would emerge to deposit their eggs.

Thus, for the first and only time, as a man, Poe dwelt in a sub-tropical climate whose distant horizons, murmuring palms, vegetation and animal life were indelibly to impress his mind; impressions which often recur in his tales, together with the pirate legends that still flourished there. It was from the later fusion of these elements, the all-but deserted island, the sand-scarabs, the legends of pirates and buried treasure, the hermits dwelling in huts amid the myrtles, and a still older memory fecundating all, that one day *The Gold Bug* would be born.

For, in fact, Poe had long before visited Charleston, in that distant spring of 1811 when, though ailing, his mother still went on tour to provide for her babes. And these memories, though unconscious, of that paradisaical past, when he was nearing three, might well have linked what he felt at Fort Moultrie with what, in the same surroundings, he had felt as a child.

To the lullaby of this southern sea, Poe now composed *Al Aaraaf*, that cosmic poem in which Nesace, Beauty's spirit, descends to earth from her star and there holds converse with God—a "sound of silence"—and apostrophises Ligeia, "music of all things". In this poem, two lovers, who have died on earth but live on in the star, are precipitated into space, for "Heaven . . . no hope imparts who hear not for the beating of their hearts".

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This poem, in which passages of ethereal and truly poetic beauty alternate with others rough and obscure, was doubtless inspired by the glittering night-sky of the South. *Al Aaraaf* is rooted in Poe's ancient passion for astronomy, and the time when, through the telescope on John Allan's porch, he so earnestly scanned the moon and stars. This passion for astronomy seizes many a child and adolescent when education demands the repression of instinctual urges, for the sky is the bourne of those who seek escape from earthly realities; realities to which, in certain ways, Poe was never to return.

Meanwhile, acquaintance with life's harsher sides, and his productive leisure, seem to have strengthened his already considerable belief in his literary powers. Late in 1828 he seems to have resumed contact with John Allan after a silence of nearly two years for, whether by letter or through friends, we find him asking authority from John Allan to permit him to leave the army before his remaining three years' service expired. Lieut. J. Howard was much interested in the brilliant young soldier, employed as a clerk, and had promised to secure his release should a reconciliation be effected.

John Allan, who thus, at last, learnt where Edgar might be found, replied to Mr. Lay, charged with the matter, that Edgar had better stay where he was until his enlistment ended. This letter, reaching Lieut. Howard, momentarily ended Edgar's hopes.

Since he had inherited his uncle's wealth, the snobbishness latent in John Allan had become greatly accentuated. It irked him to think of an actor's son in his house. There was something discreditable, too, about a private's rank and it was, in part, to wipe this out, that Poe invented his grand tour of Europe. To minister to John Allan's pride, Poe should at least have returned an officer.

In his letter from Fort Moultrie, dated December 1st, 1828, Edgar refutes John Allan's views and informs him that he can gain nothing by remaining a private, for both his age and his service in the ranks preclude him from entering the Military Academy at West Point. This is Poe's first mention of West Point.

In this letter, Poe also expresses his belief in himself and his future, and the conviction that he will realise his hopes and fulfil the highest wishes of his foster-father. That conviction, he adds, is the best guarantee of success. "I have thrown myself on the world like the Norman conqueror on the shores of Britain," he writes, "and, by my avowed assurance of victory, have destroyed the fleet which could alone cover my retreat—I must either conquer or die—succeed or be disgraced." Money, he

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says, he does not desire: all he asks is a statement that John Allan is reconciled and that he desires Edgar's discharge. The letter ends: "My dearest love to Ma—it is only when absent that we can tell the value of such a friend . . ."¹

John Allan made no reply to this desperate letter.

Meanwhile Edgar, vainly awaiting an answer, was journeying north, his Battery having been ordered to Fortress Monroe at Old Point Comfort, Virginia.

Fortress Monroe was reached in December, 1828, but there was still no letter from John Allan. Again the prospect of garrison life seemed to stretch interminably before him. It seems that his only friends at this time were a few N.C.Os., among whom Sergeants Benton, Griffith and Hooper, as we learn from his subsequent letter to Sgt. "Bully" Graves; a letter destined to play a cardinal part in Poe's history.

With every day that passed, leaving his letter unanswered, Edgar became more desperate. Finally, on December 22nd, he once more wrote to John Allan. Though his ambition, he said, had not taken the channel his "father" had wished, it was none the less certain of its object: Richmond and the United States were too narrow a sphere for what he hoped to do and the world would be his theatre. In these prophetic lines we see all Poe's faith in his genius. He then adds that his desire is to be freed from the army and indeed, his disgust of life in barracks, of the monotonous drill and his rough and vulgar comrades, is apparent throughout this letter.²

Lieut. Howard, he says, has already given him an introduction to Col. James House, who had known his grandfather, "General" David Poe. The Colonel and other officers believe he can be admitted to West Point in spite of his age, if only John Allan supports him. . . Yet this letter, too, went unanswered. Mr. Allan's harshness may well seem incredible, especially when one considers that his dying wife continually implored him to let her see 'her' Edgar before she died.

Meanwhile, on January 1st, 1829, soon after arriving at Fortress Monroe, Edgar A. Perry was promoted to the highest rank then open to N.C.Os., that of Sergeant Major. It was a responsible post, for the whole of the regiment's correspondence passed through his hands.

That same month, Poe was struck down by fever. Doctor Archer, who tended him in the barracks' hospital, took a liking to the young man,

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 6.

² *op. cit.*, Letter 7.

Army Life

who then confessed his identity. Possibly it was through Mr. Archer that Mrs. Allan, then on her deathbed, learnt that Edgar, at Old Point Comfort, was so close at hand.

Finally, her entreaties gained the day and John Allan summoned Edgar to the side of his "mother". But it was now too late for, on Saturday February 28th, 1829, while Sgt.-Major Edgar A. Perry was answering the morning roll-call at Fortress Monroe, Mrs. Allan died at Richmond, a few miles away.

CHAPTER XII

After the Death of Frances Allan

MRS. ALLAN, dying, had made her husband promise not to abandon Edgar to his fate. She also begged not to be buried before he saw her for the last time, a plea which was to prove of no avail.

On Sunday, March 1st, 1829, Edgar boarded the stage coach at Norfolk and reached Richmond the next evening, where he found the household in tears . . . but Frances was already buried and he never saw her again.

Legend relates that Edgar, next day, visited her grave in Shockoe cemetery, where he would have to pass the grave of Mrs. Stanard, his first "Helen". Such was his grief, it is said, that he collapsed on the new-made grave and such his weakness, that the servants were forced to raise him and help him into the carriage.

Later, he was to write: "If she had not have died while I was away there would have been nothing for me to regret".¹ And indeed, all the protection and love he had known were buried with her. Because of her love she had understood and forgiven everything. Had not her illness rendered her helpless, had she not died, Edgar's whole life-story of poverty, wretchedness and fall would doubtless have been very different. Such were the consequences, for Edgar, of once more losing a mother.

He was twenty. And fate, for the third time, had re-enacted the self-same tragedy for him: first, the death by consumption of his mother Elizabeth, then that of his "Helen" insane and doubtless prey to an illness of which we have no details and, finally, that of Frances Allan, of a mysterious illness after a long decline. The repetition-compulsion which governs our deepest instincts thus, as often happens, assumed for Poe the semblance of a fate imposed by destiny; a fate which, one by one, in similar though varied fashion, stole his "mothers" Yet also, given

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 24.

After the Death of Frances Allan

his fixation on the real mother he had loved so passionately and seen both dying and dead, it so happened that these fearful bereavements, though they broke his heart, were also an intense satisfaction. For, in a sense, they appeased its hunger.

He had not seen his "Helen" dead in his adolescence, nor had he gazed on his foster-mother's countenance, frozen in death. And it may be that what, during this tragic time, he found most difficult to forgive John Allan—frightful as it may seem—was that the latter had denied him this ultimate vision of love and horror. Did he not later write the well-known lines.

"'Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?' Death—was the obvious reply. 'And when', I said, 'is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?' From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious—When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."¹

Thus Poe who, in infancy, had seen his real and dearly loved mother, beautiful and young, on her death-bed, was to retain that vision deep in his unconscious as the criterion of all beauty and art. But then he was under three and could have no conception of death. All it could mean, this death of one on whom all his love was concentrated, was pallor, cold, immobility, silence and a sleep far longer than others. These attributes, bequeathed from his mother, were thus to become things he would love with the very love he had borne her. This was the basis of the necrophilia of this poet whom death alone inspired, and who was to cast so terrible, though irresistible, a spell on mankind.

It was the lover's supreme experience at his beloved's deathbed of which John Allan thus deprived Edgar, reducing him, as after "Helen's" death, to content himself with the tomb that hid her body, in place of the bed where the corpse would seem to live still, and sleep, and call the motherless child to its arms, to its perhaps still beating heart, like a Rowena's.

We know little of the ten days or so Poe spent at Richmond. Doubtless he saw some university friends, and the Galts and Mackenzies would have met him warmly. He seems also to have visited the Roysters and to have reproached them bitterly on learning that Elmira was married to Mr. Shelton. He felt they had both been wronged and that

¹ *The Philosophy of Composition, Virginia Edition*, Vol. 14, p. 201.

advantage had been taken of his absence to influence Elmira. He demanded to see her again which, naturally, was refused and a warning sent to Mr. Shelton. This was prudent, for a certain acrimony existed between Elmira and her parents and husband, one of Edgar's intercepted letters having fallen into her hands.

Nevertheless, it was during this stay that a compromise was reached by which Edgar was to enter West Point. For John Allan, the plan had two advantages: Edgar would earn his own living and he would be quit of him for good. For Edgar, now familiar with penury and hunger, it meant regular meals and a roof and the one way of regaining his foster-father's esteem, if not affection. Thus, one day, slight though it were, he might hope for a share, however small, in John Allan's fortune and so have leisure to write. Edgar, however, would have preferred to leave the army at once and settle in Richmond to concentrate wholly upon his writing.

We cannot blame John Allan for not recognising Edgar's genius at first blush. It is a far easier matter for us, to-day, than then for John Allan, whose practical, objective mind was ill-equipped to deal with ideas. It was natural enough therefore, as regards Edgar's future, that he should have preferred West Point and a military career for him, than the life of a writer.

On his return to Fortress Monroe, Poe immediately took steps to enter West Point. He obtained testimonials to the War Department from his superior officers and found a substitute for the three years that remained of his term of enlistment.

Col. House of the First Artillery now wrote to the Department of the East, requesting the release of Sgt.-Major Edgar A. Perry. The release was duly accorded by Gen. E. P. Gaines, in charge of the Department and, on February 15th, 1829, Poe was given his discharge and replaced by another sergeant.

Neither Col. House nor Lieut. Howard who, respectively, commanded "Edgar A. Perry's" regiment and company, witnessed his discharge. Thus, no one in authority was present to check the transaction. As a result, Poe found himself obliged to acquit his substitute with \$75 in place of the usual sum of \$12, which amount he had asked of John Allan. He thus found it necessary to give his substitute a note of hand for \$50, which he later paid from a further \$100 sent him from Richmond. John Allan was therefore wrong in imagining that Edgar had tricked him and squandered the money intended to buy him out, as was the second Mrs. Allan, Louisa Gabriella, *née* Patterson when, in a letter published after the deaths of Poe and her husband, she accused the former of having misapplied this money.

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This letter was written to Col. Ellis and purports to explain why the two men broke off relations. According to her, Poe squandered the money, and so long delayed obtaining his discharge, that his exasperated substitute finally wrote to John Allan for payment. Payment, she claimed, was made, but from that moment he refused to have further dealings with Edgar. This story, however, fails in face of the now known facts, for the second Mrs. Allan seems to have confused this imagined letter from Poe's substitute with one which, in fact, Poe wrote to Sgt. "Bully" Graves who did, indeed, send it to John Allan, thus precipitating the break between the two men. To this letter we shall later revert.

In late April, 1829, Edgar left Fortress Monroe for Richmond, furnished with warm testimonials from his Lieutenant, Lieutenant-Colonel and Captain, commending his sobriety and conduct. John Allan also obtained similar influential letters and added one of his own, which ran as follows:

"Richmond, May 6, 1829

Dr Sir,—The youth who presents this is the same alluded to by Lt. Howard, Capt. Griswold, Col. Worth, our representative and the speaker, the Hon'ble Andrew Stevenson, and my friend Major Jno Campbell.

He left me in consequence of some gambling at the University of Charlottesville, because (I presume) I refused to sanction a rule that the shop-keepers and others had adopted there, making Debts of Honour of all indiscretions. I have much pleasure in asserting that he stood his examination at the close of the year with great credit to himself. His history is short. He is the grandson of Quartermaster-Gen'l Poe of Maryland, whose widow, as I understand, still receives a pension for the services or disability of her husband. Frankly, Sir, do I declare that he is no relation to me whatever; that I have many whom I have taken an active interest to promote theirs; with no other feeling than that every man is my care, if he be in distress; for myself I ask nothing but I do request your kindness to aid this youth in the promotion of his future prospects. And it will afford me great pleasure to reciprocate any kindness you can show him. Pardon my frankness; but I address a soldier.

Your Ob'd't se'v't,
John Allan ¹

The Hon'ble
John H. Eaton,
Sec'y of War,
Washington City."

¹ *Israfel*, p. 241.

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With this somewhat cool commendation and other testimonials, Poe left Richmond for Washington early in May, expecting to present his letters to the War Secretary. But he met the usual fate of petitioners: his papers were filed and months passed without an answer.

His stay in Washington was short and in mid-May we find him at Baltimore, where he discovered his aged grandmother Mrs. David Poe, widow of the "General", and other relatives. Here, for the first time, he seems to have realised the extent of the posthumous fame surrounding his grandfather. So far, he had known little of his forebears but, repulsed by John Allan and his "Ma" gone, "Edgar Allan" began to feel more and more "Edgar Poe".

His sole provision when he left Richmond was \$50, furnished by John Allan, who thenceforth sent him rare and trivial sums with which he was enjoined to be "prudent and careful". John Allan also informed him that Colonel Preston, who knew him as a child, had written to the War Department in his favour. From Richmond too, at his request, his papers and books were at last restored, in the iron-bound trunk which was to accompany him all through life.

Thus, in the months before he entered West Point, Edgar experienced great want; his only provision for bed, board and fare to Washington and then to Baltimore, being his trivial subsidies from John Allan. With this money, too, he was expected to find clothes for, as yet, he had nothing but his uniform to wear. In addition, whatever John Allan might think, he had had to pay his substitute \$50. To cap all, his cousin, Mosher Poe, his room-mate in a Baltimore hotel, robbed him of \$46 and, though Poe thoroughly searched his clothes, all he recovered was \$10.

But yet more annoying news was to reach John Allan, namely, that Edgar, in Baltimore, was attempting to publish *Al Aaraaf*. Here, for the first time, we see him use the device which was later to become a practice; the submission of a poem, as though for criticism, to the verdict of an influential man of letters, in this case, William Wirt, the celebrated author of the *Letters of a British Spy*. Wirt replied that evening and, startled by the cosmic lyricism of the poem, recommended its author to seek a critic more versed in the modern.

Next morning, Poe took the boat to Philadelphia and offered his poems to the publishing house of Carey, Lea and Carey. They, however, before the month ended, replied that they could not risk publishing the work of an unknown poet and asked him to guarantee its cost, \$100. Confident in the good cause of his genius, Edgar appealed to John Allan.

Great was the latter's alarm and disgust to learn that Edgar still clung



POE'S AUNT
MARIA CLEMM
1790-1871
(from a daguerréotype taken in 1849)

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to his chimæric verse and literary career. He flatly refused the guarantee and strongly censured Poe's "conduct".

Meanwhile, no news reached Edgar regarding West Point, and his poverty continued uninterrupted save for an occasional tart letter from John Allan enclosing a trifling sum barely sufficient to keep body and soul together. Finally, on July 23rd, 1829, no longer able to endure his uncertainty and want, Edgar set out on foot for Washington, intending to apply in person to the War Secretary.

He there learnt that there was a surplus of ten cadets before him on the roll for entry, the next term, into West Point. It was possible, however, that vacancies might occur, in which case Edgar would be admitted in September. With this still distant hope, Edgar, again on foot, returned to Baltimore.

Then it was that, at the end of his tether, Poe wrote saying he was anxious to return home. To this, however, he received no reply. Meanwhile, hearing nothing further from Carey, Lea and Carey, he asked that his manuscript of *Al Aaraaf* be returned.

At this juncture, Poe was received for the first time into the home of his aunt, Maria Clemm.

Maria Poe Clemm was then about forty, having been born on March 17th, 1790. Thus, she was five or six years younger than David her brother, Edgar's father. When twenty-seven, she had married a moderately well-off Baltimore widower, William Clemm, already the father of five children. He dying on February 8th, 1826, she was left penniless with two children to support, his own slender fortune being entailed on his first wife's children. Maria's two children were Henry, born September 10th, 1818, and Virginia Eliza, born August 15th, 1822.¹ A third child, Virginia Maria, died in infancy.

Mrs. Clemm, at this time, occupied humble lodgings in Mechanic's Row, Milk Street, Baltimore. With her were her daughter Virginia, her son Henry, her mother the "General's" widow, and Edgar's brother, William Henry Leonard Poe. The grandmother was paralysed, Virginia but seven, and Henry, a stone-cutter, drank most of his pay. Henry Poe, then twenty-two, was unemployed and an equally hard drinker: in addition, he was in an advanced stage of consumption.

Though Mrs. Clemm was by no means well, her large maternal heart

¹ Woodberry, Vol. I, page 137, note 1.

managed to find room for Edgar despite the burden she already bore as mainstay of the house

The family income at this time was the modest pension of the General's widow, the stone-cutter's small wage and the trifling and intermittent sums sent by John Allan.

Edgar seems to have shared the small attic room with his brother Henry, in which room Henry, later, died. Though both his parents were tubercular and he himself far from robust, Edgar's constitution must have been especially resistant and, in fact, immunised against tuberculosis from infancy, to prevent him contracting the disease since, all through life, fate was to place him in constant, intimate contact with consumptives.

Virginia was a pretty, laughing, chubby child, with brown hair, "violet" eyes and winsome manners. She would have been greatly pleased by the arrival of her big cousin "Eddie", whom she adored and followed admiringly from room to room. He, too, was charmed by her childish grace and was soon calling her "Sis" or "Sissie".

The fare was frugal. At night the family would gather about the candle-lit table to partake of the simple fare prepared by Mrs. Clemm. The old grandmother talked of the past and the youngsters of the drab present, after which the two brothers would mount to their attic. While Henry, in bed, shook with coughing, Edgar, in threadbare clothes, would sit at the table until the candle guttered out, writing or revising his poems.

Meanwhile, September had passed with no summons to West Point, and Edgar again appealed to John Allan for money, only to be told he had lacked "industry and zeal" in his efforts to obtain the appointment. Had not Edgar, he asked, deceived him in reporting his meeting with the War Secretary? To which, in reply, Edgar affirms he has told the truth and says he will again return to Washington, once more to plead his cause.

Now, however, he lacked the necessary money for the journey, even on foot, and was thus forced to spend the long winter in Baltimore, awaiting his entry into West Point.

In December, 1829, Poe's second book of poems, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*, appeared in Baltimore, published by Hatch and Dunning. This work had been heralded in September with an article by John Neal, a prominent literary critic and editor of the *Yankee and Boston Literary Gazette*. Poe had sent him *Al Aaraaf* and some shorter poems after making his acquaintance through his cousin, George Poe, and a Mr. Herring, who had wedded his aunt, Eliza Poe. Neal's article treated the cosmic lyricism of the young poet somewhat ironically and jocularly quoted some of the verse. In the main, however, he did the

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young poet's genius justice. In December, again, Neal published some other poems by Poe in the *Yankee*, preceded by an editorial note.

For the first time public attention was thus drawn to the name of Edgar Allan Poe and echoes of this modest success doubtless reached John Allan. This, probably, contributed to the permission given Edgar, late in 1829 or early in 1830, to return to Richmond until his entry into West Point.

Although "Edgar's room" awaited him in his childhood home, no Frances Allan was there to gladden it and no Elmira passed through the neighbouring gardens. Only his Aunt Nancy's love remained to him in the house at Richmond.

But, here, he again saw his sister Rosalie at the Mackenzies, surrounded by the affection of which he was denied. And he gave copies of *Al Aaraaf* to old schoolmates, who were mystified by the poems. This was when, to impress them, he began to create the legend of his distant travels, to which he added incidents from his brother Henry's life when a cadet. These tall tales flattered his inventiveness and pride, for they concealed the period when he was a ranker.

John Allan's health had been growing worse and now he once more resorted to Virginia Hot Springs for treatment. On his return on May 3rd, 1830, a new and violent quarrel broke out, in which he bitterly reproached Edgar for his idleness and for living at his expense, and repeated the old aspersions on his family. Edgar reacted by spending the next half-hour writing the letter to Sgt. "Bully" Graves which weighed so heavily, later, on his future.

Sgt. Samuel Graves, nicknamed "Bully", had served with Edgar at Fortress Monroe and had, at times, lent him money. Now Edgar wrote that it was Mr. Allan's fault that he could not repay him; he had tried to get the money a dozen times, and to repay the other sergeants, but had always failed since Mr. Allan was "not very often sober".¹

It was this letter, later coming into his foster-father's hands, which caused the second Mrs. Allan to accuse Edgar of not paying his substitute the money sent for that purpose by John Allan. Sgt. Graves, however, was not the substitute Poe provided. Again, it was this letter accusing him of drunkenness which so enraged John Allan that it provided a pretext for "disinheriting" Edgar.

Possibly, John Allan did at times drink overmuch, but this was then fairly general with rich merchants. He also felt his wife's death and may

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 21.

have sought thus to dull his sorrow, in particular since he may not have felt blameless in her regard. Our mourning and our grief are often based on remorse!

But perhaps a better understanding of the tensions which precipitated this violent quarrel in March, says Hervey Allen, is provided by a note and date that occur in John Allan's will: "The twins were born some time about the first of July, 1830".¹

This was doubtless why, more than ever, John Allan, from May on, wished to rid himself of Edgar and his devotion to the memory of his "Ma". And nothing would be likelier to effect this than to attack his family and his mother's honour. Thus, "at a time when you knew my heart was breaking", as he wrote later, Poe penned the famous letter to "Bully" in the half-hour which followed their quarrel.

One of his women had gone and, in her place, John Allan must find another. The rich merchant could no longer indulge in illicit amours; he needed another wife. Thus it was that, during Edgar's visit, he caressed the idea of marrying his sister-in-law, Nancy Valentine who, since Frances's death, had taken charge of his house and become its life and spirit.

Edgar seems violently to have opposed this match and used all his influence with his aunt to prevent it. Subsequently, he was accused of acting thus in his own interests, to prevent a legitimate heir being born to John Allan. But Edgar must have been animated by quite other motives. Not only by conscious respect to the memory of his dear "Ma", whom his "Pa" so soon thought of replacing, but by other and far deeper motives of which he was unaware.

For Edgar had transferred to his Aunt Nancy the lover-like jealousy he had felt, when a child, for his "Ma". He could not, without horror, think of her in his detested "father's" arms; he who, emotionally, sexually, had been his harsh, successful rival, when Edgar was a child.

John Allan, naturally, was much exasperated by this opposition and by the victory now gained by his "son". He therefore bestirred himself to obtain from Gen. Scott and Senator Powhatan Ellis the letters required to enable Edgar to enter West Point. Before May was out, he had accompanied him to the boat for Baltimore. Edgar was later to say that he felt their parting hand-clasp was meant for a final adieu.

Passing through Baltimore, where his Aunt Maria made him welcome, Edgar eventually reached West Point by way of Philadelphia and New

¹ *Israfel*, p. 294.

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York. He passed the entrance examination successfully in the last week of June, and on July 1st took the oath to "preserve the Constitution of the United States and serve them against all their enemies whomsoever". Provided with the written consent of his guardian, he enlisted for five years.

John Allan now announced his engagement to Miss Louisa Gabriella Patterson of New York, then about thirty. This marriage was to seal Edgar's fate, in so far as concerned John Allan.

CHAPTER XIII

West Point: The First Great Poems

IT was with no light heart that Poe entered West Point. He already knew the hardships and monotony of a military life. Whether as private, sergeant-major or cadet, he was not made for a soldier's existence. But there was no choice: it was either poverty or West Point.

John Allan had sent Edgar to West Point "like a beggar",¹ his sole provision being two blankets and \$20. Doubtless, he considered that army rations and the \$28 paid monthly to the cadets absolved him from further helping Edgar. But this parsimony, which so tortured Edgar, like all parsimony, it must be remembered, *related to somebody or something*. John Allan's parsimony, however he saw it, was his way of expressing his growing aversion to Edgar. As his affection decreased, so did the money he sent him. Thus West Point was to prove as bitter an ordeal to Poe as had the University of Virginia.

For at West Point Poe found himself disinherited, alone and surrounded by youths amply supplied. He lacked even toilet necessities, linen, underclothes, books, candles and soap. Meanwhile, the letter from John Allan which had conveyed this \$20 accused Edgar of taking away, from his room, the ink-stand and sand-box engraved "John Allan", though these were all his relics of a once happy past.

Although Edgar continued to write to his guardian, no further communication reached him until January, 1831.

In those days the U.S. Military Academy at West Point consisted of several buildings on a bluff over the Hudson River. The staff numbered about thirty and there were some two hundred and fifty cadets.

At West Point there was none of the "aristocratic" scorn from which Poe, as an actor's son, had suffered at the University of Virginia. Another prejudice, however, took its place: contempt for one-time rankers. That was why Poe, to restore his esteem and offset his poverty, revived his legend of a Byronic life, posing as one who had travelled much and

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 24.

West Point: The First Great Poems

experienced many an adventure. He had fought in Greece, been imprisoned in Russia and released by the American consul, and had visited Arabia and other countries. To his tales, he added his brother Henry's adventures, the final result of which was to create that legend of his youthful travels which has deceived so many of his biographers.

He also liked to shroud himself in a veil of mystery as protection from their scorn. Nor did he deny the tale, that he himself is said to have spread, of being the traitor, Benedict Arnold's, grandson.¹ Before he entered West Point, he once greatly annoyed John Allan with this tale, and now it served to adorn him with a kind of "satanic" prestige.

In summer the cadets lived under canvas and in winter in barracks. Poe's fellow-cadets seem to have been fairly commonplace, and proud, taciturn, absorbed as he was, he doubtless stood out conspicuously among them. Nor was there much in the life to appeal to him, with its multitude of petty fixed tasks, which left him less leisure than when a private. Only scholastic achievements seem, to some extent, to have interested him and we find him, at the half year examination, seventeenth in mathematics and third in French, in a class of eighty-seven.

Poe's proud and tragic expression and his air of precocious maturity soon singled him out for his comrades' witticisms. Edgar, it was said, was in fact impersonating his son, who had died after acceptance to the Academy. Though Edgar had entered slightly above the age limit of twenty-one, this of itself would hardly have sufficed to inspire the story.

The truth was that Poe lived in a different world from his comrades and was unmoved by what interested them. He had nothing but aversion for the industrial and materialist age then beginning to dawn, with its factories, railroads and steamships. Alike, he denounced mechanics and science, and expressed this view in a sonnet written at this time:

SONNET—TO SCIENCE ²

Science! true daughter of Old Time thou art!
Who alterest all things with thy peering eyes.
Why preyest thou thus upon the poet's heart,
Vulture, whose wings are dull realities?

¹ It will be remembered that his mother's maiden name was Arnold.

² To SCIENCE: 1829; 1831; *Southern Literary Messenger*, May, 1836; 1845; *Broadway Journal*, II, 4. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol 7, p. 156.) I quote the text of 1845, after the *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 22. Apart from a number of variants which do not alter the general sense of the poem, the preceding versions read "*shrubby*" in place of "*tamarind tree*".

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How should he love thee? or how deem thee wise,
Who wouldst not leave him in his wandering
To seek for treasure in the jewelled skies,
Albeit he soared with an undaunted wing?
Hast thou not dragged Diana from her car,
And driven the Hamadryad from the wood
To seek a shelter in some happier star?
Hast thou not torn the Naiad from her flood,
The Elfin from the green grass, and from me
The summer dream beneath the tamarind tree?

This sonnet—it has been said—voices the revolt of one whom poetry enthralled, against a world in which materialism was beginning to triumph; in other words, voices the opposition of art and science. The theme has intoxicated many a young poet. But on another plane, we might say that the poem represents the revolt of the pleasure principle against the reality principle. Yet the sonnet assumes a new meaning if we compare it with *To Helen*, for we then see what Naiad brings “home” the poet to “the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome” and who, in the sonnet, with her attendant train, is exiled by ruthless Science from the woods and waters and all earthly haunts so that, like Nesace and Ligeia in *Al Aaraaf*, her only refuge is the stars. We then realise that the “Elfin” torn from his paradisaal lawns and “shrubbery” (or, as later corrected, “tamarind tree”) is himself, the poet, torn from his “mothers”, Elizabeth, Helen and Frances. Whereupon “Science” is seen to be no abstraction but a symbol of the detested “father”, who drove him from his loved Frances, and did not even let him see her dead. The hard-headed, matter-of-fact merchant, by the simple associative mechanism proper to the unconscious, thus becomes represented by Science, with which, in fact, he had no connection, apart from his matter-of-fact-ness! For the same reason, “Science”, strangely enough, is termed “daughter of Old Time”; i.e., the appanage of Time, thus being identified, in accordance with the processes of the unconscious—which in this case troubles itself little about sex—with Time and so the “father”. This was another reason why Poe hated science and would hate it, as bitterly, all his life.

The probable date of this sonnet confirms this interpretation, for it does not appear in the first collection, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, Boston, May 1827, published soon after Edgar left home. It first appears in his second volume, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*, Baltimore, December 1829. Thus *To Science* was probably written between these two dates, after he was brutally torn from his loved “mother” by

West Point: The First Great Poems

John Allan's ultimatum. Possibly, even, it may have been written between February and December 1829, after her death had reactivated the pangs, the mourning and revolt deep in the soul of this son from whom fate, old "Time" or the "father" had reft, one by one, his three mothers: Elizabeth, Helen and Frances. Thereafter, whether in sickness or death, they were to remain everything that "poetry" embodied.

Meanwhile, on October 5th, 1830, at New York, John Allan married Louisa Gabriella Patterson and in his letter to him, dated November 6th, John Allan being back in Richmond, Edgar expresses regret that his foster-father had not visited him when in New York. He also begins his letter "Dear Sir", as always when there was particular tension between them,¹ in place of the more usual "Dear Pa".

John Allan's remarriage ended any illusions Edgar might have cherished of a place in his affections and will. What now was the good of obedience to his wishes in entering West Point if only to be repudiated? Life at West Point began to seem intolerable to the young poet and the ensuing winter was to increase his despair.

He had thought that the military experience acquired in the ranks would help him to a rapid commission—in six months—as he wrote John Allan.² But courses and drills continued interminably and no exception could be made for Edgar, however exceptional he might be. Summer had come to an end with its small distractions of life under canvas and now all that was left, in the long autumn evenings, was the brandy he drank in Room 28, South Barracks, which he shared with two friends. Here, card-parties were held and much brandy drunk; brandy dearly procured from the village store-keeper, "Old Benny", in exchange for candles, service boots or blankets, since cash was always scarce. Sometimes these gatherings were riotous, but there were times when Poe would read satirical verses on the masters or recite prose and poetry by the hour. On one occasion he hoaxed a gathering into believing that a dead gander flung through the room, dripping with blood, was the head of one of the professors.

Yet in this atmosphere of drink and despair Poe seems to have conceived his first great poems.

* * *

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 23.

² *op. cit.*, Letter 8.

How much Edgar wrote at West Point or even at Richmond, during his last painful visit, we shall probably never know. As was his habit, Poe must have burnt much midnight oil polishing and repolishing his poems while his two room-mates slept and the plaintive *Introduction, To Helen, Irene, A Pean, The Valley Nis, The Doomed City* and *Israfel* took gradual shape. These poems, absent from the volume published in 1829, were to add lustre to the new edition issued in 1831.¹

Al Araaf, the most ambitious of the poems in the 1829 edition, was the projection of the poet's first loves on the skies. Unguessed by him, Nesace, spirit of Beauty, doubtless embodied his "Helen" as Ligeia, spirit of Universal Harmony, embodied his actress mother whose voice had charmed him as a babe. Angelo and Yanthe were but earlier appellations of Monos and Una, Eiros and Charmion, whom we shall later meet in his works. Yet, this first stellar poem by the author of *Eureka* seems incoherent and cold. Such astral displacements of earthly instincts, common to ardent and repressed natures which seek to evade their impact, often fail to move the reader for, in losing contact with earth, we also lose contact with man.

Far otherwise were the new poems which enriched the 1831 edition, for an event of prime importance had occurred between the publication of the two groups of poems: the loss of his "Ma", Frances Allan. His "Helen", too, had died in his adolescence, a radiant fleeting vision who, with her "Naiad airs", had brought him back to his own "native shore". Yet why did he not include his immortal poem *To Helen*, reputedly written at fourteen, in either the 1827 or 1829 editions? And what sense of delicacy can have kept the young poet, thirsting for fame, from then including what was, so far, the most accomplished of his poems? In all likelihood *To Helen*, if written, was far from being the finished poem we know and was only polished to its present shape after the death of Frances Allan. For the "Helen" who inspired the poem was not alone Mrs. Stanard to whom it was dedicated, but his "Ma".² It was the

¹ *Preface* (1829); *Introduction* (1831); *Romance* (1843, 1845).

To Helen (1831, 1836, 1841, 1843, 1845).

Irene (1831, 1836); *The Sleeper* (1843, 1845).

A Pean (1831, 1836); *Lenore* (1843, 1845).

The Valley Nis (1831, 1836); *The Valley of Unrest* (1845).

The Doomed City (1831); *The City of Sin* (1836); *The City in the Sea* (1845).

Israfel (1831, 1836, 1841, 1843, 1845).

² Hervey Allen well senses this dual inspiration in *To Helen*. (*Israfel*, p. 308.)

immense shock of her death, when he was twenty, which first made the genius of *Israfel* soar.

In 1825, a year after the death of Mrs. Stanard, the Allans moved to *Main and Fifth Streets* and it is to Hervey Allen that we owe the following description: "Poe's room was at the end of a hall that ended in a wedge-shaped alcove just beyond a rather dark twist in the stairs. In this recess, so that it protruded somewhat beyond the door, was a table upon which stood an *agate lamp*, always kept burning at night, because of the dark stairs and hall."¹ The italics are Allen's and justly, for the agate lamp in "Helen's" hand, which recalls him to his "native shore", is the vigilant lamp in his "mother's" house which nightly burnt at his door. Here, in the poem, it becomes her symbol.

Actually, the "agate lamp" appears for the first time in the 1843 edition of "*To Helen*". Before this, in the versions published in 1831, 1836 and 1841, it is a "folded scroll" which Helen holds in her hand.² The reader will recall that Edgar is said to have read his first poems to Mrs. Stanard and perhaps have given her copies. This, the "folded scroll" seems to confirm, and to link *To Helen* with Mrs. Stanard. But as the poet grew in years, what was deepest re-emerged, as happens to us all, and the tutelary agate lamp, symbol of Frances Allan, of the maternal abode, is substituted for the "folded scroll".

Frances Allan, naturally, was infinitely more important to Poe than Mrs. Stanard. She had been his mother in every sense, after his real mother's death. She it was who had rescued, loved and ministered to him for seventeen long years, who had protected him from her dour husband as much as her delicate health and gentle though, possibly, indolent nature allowed. Now she was gone, in Edgar's unconscious mind she fused more and more with his first real mother, also reft from him after months of illness which, to the child, must have seemed years. Only Frances Allan's death had been necessary to raise her to the stature of his mother.

It was for that reason that Frances Allan's death was the second cardinal event in his existence. The first had been that of his true mother, and the third and last was to be that of Virginia, his wife.

True, Frances's death had deprived him of a home and inheritance, and had doomed him to poverty and distress. But that was relatively unimportant compared with the fact that it was her death which woke to

¹ *Israfel*, p. 128.

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 171.

life the genius slumbering in the twenty-year-old Poe though, sometime, no doubt, it would have come to life.

For it was her death which reactivated his infantile Œdipus complex by conjuring up, once more, through recent events, the actors in the tragedy he had watched as a three-year-old child. Fate had again taken his mother; the fate we confound with the father and God. Thus, unconsciously and consciously, Poe held John Allan, who for him then embodied the father, responsible for her death.

A seething Œdipal antagonism was at work in the two men and was soon to come to a clash, as will be apparent. But already its echo was strong in Poe's poems. The dead lady in *A Pean* (later *Lenore*) and *Irene* in *The Sleeper*, are each the victim of man: the first is *deliberately done to death*, the second *too soon forgotten*. This motif of the woman as man's victim had its source in the then recent death of Frances Allan, but its other and deeper source lay in his infancy. This we shall deal with later when we analyse *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

What dominates the new poems published in 1831 is the recurrent figure of some lovely dead woman, limned with loving care and "necrophilist" enjoyment, or landscapes whose mournful beauty wears a similar aspect of dissolution and death. Such, more or less, were to be the women and scenes Poe described thereafter.

True, the poems written at West Point, save possibly *To Helen*, still lacked the depth and perfection they ultimately acquired through successive reworkings. But the main themes were already laid down and his inspiration unsealed in a fount that was never to fail.

And, indeed, all Poe's subsequent additions to his poems were to issue from ever deeper unconscious sources, thrust open, one after another, by his life. And if, for example, in the versions of *Lenore*, the finest is the 1843 rendering, it is because the illness of his wife Virginia, and her hemorrhages, had then reactivated all he felt at his mother's death, when he was a child.

For the "lost one" of the poems and tales is no one woman but the synthesis of many; Elizabeth, Helen, Frances and Virginia, whose features, though superimposed, nevertheless remain those of his mother, Elizabeth Arnold, worn and etherealised by disease, but still beautiful and young as, when a child, he saw her on her death-bed. That image was to live on unchanged in his unconscious and issue therefrom endlessly repeated, as when he limns *The Sleeper* in her moonlit room:

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"My love, she sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,
As it is lasting so be deep!
Soft may the worms about her creep!
Far in the forest, dim and old,
For her may some tall vault unfold:
Some vault that oft hath flung its black
And wingéd panels fluttering back,
Triumphant, o'er the crested palls
Of her grand family funerals" . . .¹

Thus, the son of two poverty-struck actors, in his poet's pride, bestows an all-but royal funeral and the most illustrious of lineages on his mother. But these are the compensations given by poetry and dreams, each subservient to our desires.

We must now consider *Introduction* and *Israfel*, the two remaining poems which, for the first time, appear in the 1831 edition. *Introduction*, though drawn from *Preface* in the 1829 edition is virtually a new poem and of the greatest interest to us given its autobiographical aspect. Here, Poe limns himself with his precocious melancholy and no less precocious poetical bent. In now famous lines—suppressed in later editions with almost the whole poem—he states his ideal love:

"I could not love except where Death
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath—
Or Hymen, Time, and Destiny
Were stalking between her and me."²

In *Israfel*, it is himself whom Poe sings under the starry guise of Israfel and after so much mortuary verse, it is a relief to breathe its sidereal air.

"In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
'Whose heart-strings are a lute;'
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell)
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice, all mute.

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¹ Text of 1845, with the corrections of Lorimer Graham, following the *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 52, *The Sleeper*.

² "Hymen": i.e., Elmira's marriage to Mr. Shelton.

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"If I could dwell
Where Israfil
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky."¹

Thus Poe, in his poet's pride, or, as we should say, the artist's narcissism, sees himself like a mightier Orpheus who charms the moon and stars and, with his genius, conquers his evil fate.

Such were cadet Edgar Allan Poe's dreams at West Point. He is said to have shown his poems to Col. Thayer, who appreciated their merit and allowed the cadets to subscribe seventy-five cents a copy, thus enabling Poe to ensure their publication. The publisher, Elam Bliss of New York, appears to have visited West Point late in 1830 to conclude arrangements with the author. The cadets, meanwhile, assumed that the book would contain Poe's verse satires on the staff and he did not deem it necessary to disabuse them.

It is debateable how long Poe would have endured his "disharmony" with his fellow-cadets and life at West Point, had not an external event precipitated by John Allan ended his stay.

This arose from the letter Poe wrote Sgt. "Bully" Graves immediately after his quarrel with John Allan. In it, Poe said he would pay what he owed at the first opportunity. May stretched to the end of the year and then, his patience exhausted, Graves wrote directly to John Allan saying he had a letter in which his ward attacked his sobriety. Grave's black-mail succeeded and John Allan sent the money, but thenceforth "banished Poe from his affections"—to quote the second Mrs. Allan, whom her husband led to believe, in his own justification, that the letter emanated from the substitute Poe had procured. Whence the legend arose that Poe had squandered the money intended to buy him out.

Now John Allan wrote a furious letter to Edgar, which reached him in the New Year. It told Edgar that he disowned him and wished never to hear his name. Poe replied on January 3rd with surely our most revealing document on the woeful relations between this "father" and "son".

In it, Poe admits his letter to "Bully" but retracts nothing it contains: God himself knows if he lied. And he bitterly arraigns John Allan's

¹ Text of 1845, after the *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 47-8.

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"mistaken parsimony" for making his lot so difficult at West Point, as at Charlottesville. "It was my crime" he says, "to have no one on Earth who cared for me or loved me", save Frances Allan. "If she had not have died while I was away there would have been nothing to regret—*Your* love I never valued—but she I believe loved me as her own child." His health, his energy, he says, have left him, but "thank God!" his life "will not endure long" and "must be passed in indigence and sickness". His existence in "this place" is unbearable to him and he intends to resign, with or without his guardian's permission. From the time of writing, he declares, he will neglect his studies and duties.

Poe did not wait for John Allan's reply to fulfil his intentions. Having nothing further to hope for from his guardian he, from January 7th, 1831, absented himself from parades and roll-calls and, from January 15th, ceased to attend lectures. On the 23rd he failed to obey an order to attend church and on the 25th, a similar order to attend lectures. On January 28th, 1831, a court martial held at West Point declared that "Cadet E. A. Poe be dismissed the service of the United States", as "guilty of all the charges and specifications".¹ Three weeks later Poe left West Point.

With him, in his iron-bound trunk, he took his manuscripts and books, his Richmond inkstand and odds and ends of army clothing. He wore a threadbare suit, doubtless traded from Old Benny, and his West Point greatcoat which he was to keep all his life. Thus, on February 19th, at West Point Pier, Edgar Allan Poe, a nondescript traveller, took passage in the *Henry Eckford* bound for New York.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 296.

CHAPTER XIV

With Mrs. Clemm at Baltimore

The First Tales

POE reached New York ill and exhausted and took lodgings near Madison Square. On February 21st, two days after leaving West Point, we find him writing to John Allan. In spite of all his "resolutions to the contrary", he is "obliged once more to recur" to him for assistance.¹ His situation is desperate. He has caught a most violent cold during the voyage, has a violent cold on his lungs, his ear continuously discharges blood and matter and he has a distracting headache. He has no money or friends and was forced to leave West Point penniless, for John Allan, by withholding permission for him to resign, has made it impossible for him to obtain the \$30.35 to which he is entitled for "mileage". In short, he is so ill that he fears he may never recover and that his end is at hand. His guardian, however, made no reply nor sent him money.

A week later—doubtless to his astonishment—Poe was over his fit of despair and in Elam Bliss's office, correcting the proofs of his third book of poems.²

The volume appears to have been published a month later, late in March, and was "respectfully dedicated" to the U.S. Corps of Cadets, to whom it doubtless remained an enigma. Disappointed not to find the expected skits on the staff, the cadets must have regretted the seventy-five cents many had contributed to its publication.

The volume opened with a preface, the "Letter to B.", Poe's first critical effort and one which already reveals his merits and his defects as a critic. Here he expounds what nowadays we should call his doctrine of

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 25.

² *Poems*, by Edgar A. Poe. Second Edition, New York; Elam Bliss, 1831.

"Art for Art's sake", a doctrine he had borrowed almost word for word from Coleridge.¹ In it, he also communicates his theory of criticism and maintains that the more poetical the critic the juster his critique. All in all, this essay is a piece of special pleading to justify his own verse and standards. From the point of view of the psycho-analyst, however, its most interesting feature is the sharp and violent attack on established authorities which we here encounter for the first time. Wordsworth is flayed and even Coleridge, his demi-god, is attacked for his metaphysics. Dr. Johnson, too, gets a passing thrust. This "Letter to B." is headed West Point and it is no accident, at a time when his greatest poems were beginning to dawn, owing to the reactivation of his Œdipus complex as a result of the death of Frances Allan, that he should break with his "father" John Allan and embark on the series of slashing criticisms in which his "fathers" in poetry were demolished and hurled down. His hate of the "father" and his love for the "mother", intensely stimulated, on the one hand gave birth to his criticism and, on the other, to his verse.

The appearance of his book, however, and Elam Bliss's kindness in sometimes asking him to dinner, did little to solve the problem of his existence. We therefore find him, in a new fit of despair, writing to Col. Thayer to ask for help in enlisting, with Lafayette's help, in the Polish revolutionary forces: a letter in which he proposes to proceed to Paris at the first opportunity. But his letter went unanswered and, late in March, he went by boat to Baltimore. At his aunt's house he found Virginia about to celebrate her ninth birthday, his grandmother totally paralysed and his brother Henry dying. In Mrs. Clemm he had once more found a mother and, under her humble roof, a home.

The next two years of Poe's life are termed by Hervey Allen the "mysterious years". And, indeed, we have little evidence of this time, though sufficient to enable us to reconstruct the broad outline of his life and work.

We know, for instance, that both Edgar and Henry, together again in the same house, simultaneously paid court, more or less, to a Kate Blakely. But though Edgar wrote her verses, the relation was never anything but platonic.

Soon, Henry was unable to leave his bed in the shared attic and, on August 1st, 1831, died of tuberculosis, leaving Edgar with a debt of \$80 incurred in connection with his brother's illness. For the second time in

¹ *Israfel*, p. 307.

his life, Edgar gazed on the blanched, dead face, of one of his family.

Thereafter, he was alone in the attic, with none to hear him recite the poems hammered out in the night hours.

Then it was that Edgar, in despair, wrote to John Allan, regretting his conduct and resigning himself to what fate the latter dealt out. He had been thinking over old times . . . his heart was full and he would like a reconciliation. To this, also, came no reply.¹

Edgar had finally lost all credit with his "Pa". But, infantile as he was—and destined to remain—and incapable of ordering his material existence, he was to need some tutelary genius all his life to provide him with food and shelter. Fortunately, there was a waiting place in the motherly heart of his aunt, Maria Clemm. Henry Poe was dead and Henry Clemm was a brute and drunkard. Edgar, far better than her son, could answer her boundless capacity for devotion. Thus, daily, he became more and more like a "son" and, with Virginia, shared the treasures of her large, motherly heart.

She, herself, was miraculously active to maintain and feed her little world of dependants: Henry, Edgar, Virginia and the paralysed mother. She took in sewing and when she went out, wearing her widow's bonnet, this worthy woman always carried her famous basket which swallowed up the gifts she would beg on all sides, when hunger assailed the small household.

For poverty dogged the humble home and, what was worse, Edgar now faced a debtor's prison, unable as he was to pay the debt of \$80 which he had assumed for Henry.

In vain, on November 18th, Edgar wrote for help to John Allan. In vain, on December 5th, Mrs. Clemm added her entreaties and said that, with the greatest difficulty, she had managed to raise \$20 but still lacked \$60. As no answer came, Edgar, in the humblest terms wrote again on December 15th and yet again on the 29th.² Actually, John Allan, on hearing from Mrs. Clemm, had written on December 7th to John Walsh, his Baltimore correspondent, instructing him to "procure" Edgar's "liberation" and "give him \$20 besides". John Allan, however, *forgot to send this letter*, which remained in his desk until January 12th. It was, therefore, not until after this date that the money reached Edgar, the last he was ever to receive from John Allan.

On his return to Baltimore Poe had sought work, but unsuccessfully.

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 26. .

² *op. cit.*, Letters 27, 28, 29, 30.

Baltimore: The First Tales

Then, in the summer of 1831, the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* announced a short-story competition, the winner to receive a prize of \$100. Poe thereupon wrote and submitted some tales. Since poetry failed to feed him, he might prove more successful with prose.

Thus it came about that, in 1831 and 1832, Poe, neglecting his verse, devoted himself to prose.¹ It was an important date in the history of literature when Poe began writing *The Tales of the Folio Club* in Mrs. Clemm's garret.²

We shall leave the analysis of Poe's tales to the second part of this study: they are too important and rooted too deep in his unconscious, for us to give them a cursory survey, and it would interrupt our narrative to analyse them here. This problem does not arise with the poems, given their more immediate relation to external events in Poe's life and we may justly note and study them as we proceed. Clearly, his very real need of money would not, alone, have made him the writer we know; it was the inner urge to express the phantom, nightmare world of his soul, that necessitated the vaster canvas.

"If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul"³ he wrote, replying to the charge of imitating Hoffmann and other German writers with whom, says Woodberry, his acquaintance was slight. And he was right in claiming no debt to external influences which, at best, but wake the dormant in us. Neither economic necessity, the stimulus of others' works, drink or the opium to which, it is thought, he now first resorted, would have sufficed to inspire *Berenice*, *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher* or *The Black Cat*.

¹ The only poetic works we know of this period are *The Coliseum*, a poem which took its inspiration from antiquity and sang of the omnipotence of "Ruin", and fragments of *Politian*, a "Roman" tragedy, where the theme of woman, as man's victim, again appears. In it, Lalage, the heroine, appeals to *Politian*, her avenger (with whom Poe identifies himself), to fly with her to America.

² *Tales of the Folio Club*: *MS. Found in a Bottle*; *Berenice*; *Morella*; *Some Passages in the Life of a Lion* (*Lionizing*); *The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall*; *The Assigination* (*The Visionary*); *Bon-Bon*; *Shadow. A Parable*; *Loss of Breath. A Tale neither in nor out of "Blackwood"*; *King Pest. A Tale containing an Allegory*; *Metzengerstein*; *The Duc De L'Omelette*; *Four Beasts in one*; *the Homo-Cameleopard*; *A Tale of Jerusalem*; *Silence. A Fable*; *A Descent into the Maelström*. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, p. xxxv.) Woodberry (II, pp. 401-402) doubts the attribution of *The Maelström* to the *Folio Club* series.

³ *Preface* to first published volume of the *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, 1840. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 151.) Poe seems not to have known German.

We know almost nothing of these two mysterious years beyond that Poe, during this time, must have written his first tales in the seclusion of Mrs. Clemm's attic, issuing but rarely from the house.

The most important external event at this time was his love for Mary Devereaux, one of the many "sister"-girls in his life, an account of which Mary herself wrote forty years later.¹

Edgar's attic, in which he sat working for hours, overlooked the backs of the Essex Street houses in the "Old Town". One day, over the clothes-lines in the backyards, he saw a pretty girl at a window. Her hair was auburn and arranged in "frizzed puffs", such then being the fashion. Both hair and girl intrigued the young man and a mutual communication with handkerchiefs started. Soon a young neighbour, Mary Newman, took part in the game and the two girls often discussed the romantic young man, known to be both a soldier and poet.

One summer afternoon as both Marys sat chatting on their neighbouring porches, Edgar walked past and bowed. "Do you know him?" whispered Mary Newman. "No," answered Mary Devereaux although, at Edgar's entreaties, with Virginia as go-between, she had already sent him a lock of her hair. Edgar approached, and Mary Newman being called into the house, found himself alone with his beloved. Thereupon he began to praise her lovely hair, "the hair that poets always raved about".

From that day, for about a year, she says, he saw her every evening. In all that time, she adds, he never drank, at least, to her knowledge. She notes also that he did not care for "dark-skinned people".² He loved "desperately", was quick-tempered and very jealous. He had little control over his feelings and was not "well-balanced": "he had too much brain", adds her account. He scoffed at things sacred and never went to church. "He said often there was a mystery hanging over him he never could fathom. He believed he was born to suffer, and this embittered his whole life." Mary says that Mrs. Clemm was also wont to make vague references to a family mystery, "to some disgrace".

"Eddy" never spoke to Mary of his verse but only of his love. Virginia conveyed his letters to her. In the evenings they would go walking together and often sat "on the hills" outside the town. One moonlit

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 331 ff.

² Poe's mother's complexion must have looked white and wan in its frame of dark curls.

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night, crossing a bridge near a parson's house, Edgar took Mary's arm and sought to pull her towards it, saying: "Come Mary, let us go in and get married; we might as well get married now as at any other time". But her house was nearby and she went home.

Mary further relates that her brother was opposed to her marrying Eddy, because he seemed incapable of earning a living. Also, that John Allan once wrote to Edgar opposing the marriage (?). And again, that, after some urging from a Mr. Morris, she had one evening sung Poe's favourite ballad ("Come, rest in this bosom"), and thus made him wildly jealous.

Finally, she describes the quarrel which ended their relation. One evening, after vainly awaiting her lover until ten, her mother entered the little parlour to say it was time she was abed. The windows were open and Mary leaned her arms on the sill, buried her head in her hands and began crying. As her mother left, she saw Eddy appear, in a state of intoxication; the only time, she says, she saw him in that condition. The front door being locked, he came to the window, opened the half-closed shutters and raised Mary's head, explaining he had met some West Point friends on the bridge who had taken him to Barnum's Hotel where they had had supper and champagne. He had escaped as soon as possible, but even a glass of wine "made him tipsy", and he had drunk more than a glass.

Mary opened the door to him and they sat, in the moonlight, on the porch. Then a quarrel arose about whose cause—says Mary—she does not care to speak. Finally, she leapt from the porch and ran to the back of the house, where she knew she would find her mother. Surprised, Mrs. Devereaux exclaimed, "Mary, Mary, what's the matter?" Poe, who had followed, now entered the room, on which the mother sent Mary upstairs and remained alone with Edgar who went on repeating "I want to talk to your daughter. If you don't tell her to come down stairs, I will go after her. I have a right to!"

Mrs. Devereaux, a tall woman, then placed her back against the door of the stairs and said: "You have no right to; you cannot go upstairs."

"I have a right," Edgar replied: "She is my wife now in the sight of Heaven." Thereupon Mrs. Devereaux advised him to go home to bed, which he did.

From that night, Mary's home was shut to Edgar. Mary, herself, sent back his first letter unopened, but read the second. Poe then, in a Baltimore paper, in a short poem entitled *To Mary*, charged her with fickleness and inconstancy. When it was recognised to whom the lines

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were addressed, a certain amount of scandal resulted, culminating in Edgar's "cowhiding" Mary's uncle in his shop. Following this incident, the Devereauxs left Baltimore.

Thus Mary and Edgar's love-story ended as a similar episode was later to do. Poe arrived drunk at his betrothed's house on the eve of the wedding and was duly dismissed.

At Richmond, on April 17th, 1832, John Allan made his will. His dropsy had grown worse and now threatened his existence, which news reached Edgar, it appears, in letters from Richmond. In June, then, Edgar appeared in Richmond after an absence of two years. What did he hope? Some shred of affection, a little money, or contact with a happier past? When, however, he entered his former home and asked for his room, he was told by the old negro butler that "Marse Eddy's" room was now a guest room. Thereupon Edgar demanded to see Mrs. Allan.

She, appearing, Edgar poured forth reproaches and asked why they had taken his room? Mrs. Allan replied she considered herself mistress in her house. Poe then ventured to insinuate that she had married for money. Above, there sounded the cries of one of his "Pa's" new heirs. Mrs. Allan retorted that, far from having any "rights", John Allan's charity had put him under the greatest obligations and, at the same time, sent word to her husband, then in his office, that she and Edgar could never remain under one roof. Edgar, meanwhile, sat on obstinately until he heard the feared and familiar footsteps and tap of a cane on the floor, when he fled through one door as John Allan appeared at the other.

Thereupon, he took refuge with the Mackenzies where he again saw Rosalie, and was sent some money by his Aunt Nancy. He then returned to Baltimore.

In the autumn of 1832, Mrs. Clemm, with her paralysed mother, Virginia and Edgar, moved to 3 *Amity Street* from *Milk Street*. It was a tiny house where there was to be no change in their toilsome, penurious existence.

Throughout 1833, Edgar wrote only once to his guardian, a letter dated April 12th, 1833, and one of utmost despair. He is without means, employment or friends: "perishing for want of aid". "For God's sake pity me, and save me from destruction!"¹ To this appeal, the last his ward ever made, John Allan made no answer.

Late in July, his dropsical condition worsening, John Allan, with his

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 31.

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wife and family, his sister-in-law and menials, resorted to Virginia Hot Springs in a last, vain search for relief.

But now Edgar's fortunes began to improve. True, he had not won the prize offered by the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* but, in July, the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter* offered a prize of \$100 for the best tale and \$50 for the best poem.¹ The judges were John P. Kennedy, Dr. James H. Miller, and J. H. B. Latrobe, and it is to the latter we owe the entertaining account of the sitting which judged the competing entries, and of the instant impression made by Poe's youthful genius. He received the prize of \$100 for his *MS. Found in a Bottle* and only missed the poetry award for *The Coliseum* because of a reluctance to award both prizes to one author.

The publication of *MS. Found in a Bottle*, and the praise bestowed by the judges, at once surrounded Poe with a blaze of publicity. He thereupon called on each to tender his thanks.

Latrobe has left an interesting account of this visit. Poe made his appearance looking almost as sombre as his own raven: "He was dressed in black, and his frock coat was buttoned to the throat, where it met the black stock . . . Not a particle of white was visible". He appears to have been in that exalted condition which alternated with periods of depression. Speaking of the story on which he was at work, *The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall*, he seemed as though to be himself travelling to the moon and gesticulated, clapped his hands, stamped his foot and almost leapt into the air.

In Baltimore, at this time, there were two literary groups, one decidedly "literary", presided over by Kennedy and Gwynn, the other more journalistic, comprising those who wrote for the popular press. It was to the former of these that Poe now mainly adhered, and Kennedy, conquered by his genius, became his patron and friend and launched him on his career.

Thus 1833 ended with dawning glory, although his poverty continued as grim. And now, John Allan's end was in sight. Thus, early in the New Year Poe once more returned to Richmond, presumably in a last effort to be reconciled and plead his "rights".

The story goes that Poe, on reaching the house, pushed past the old butler who wished to stop him, leapt up the stairs and entered the room where John Allan, helpless with dropsy, sat propped by pillows in a chair.

¹ Hervey Allen states that the prizes were \$50 and \$25 respectively (*Israfel*, p. 347).

Suddenly the old man, who was reading the newspaper and had his stick at his side, spied this apparition from the past at the door. Edgar, thereupon, with that diffident air which characterised him in his "father's" presence, made as though to enter, when the old man seized his stick, half rose and brandishing it in the air, uttered a torrent of imprecations. His wife and servants then hurried in and the slaves who had once obeyed Edgar's orders ejected him from the house. Such was the last meeting between this "father" and "son".

John Allan died on March 27th, 1834. Such were the complications of his will, for in addition to legacies to his family, he had bequeathed money to his bastard male twins and to Mrs. Wills, their mother, that his wife wisely renounced all rights in it and elected to take her share under the intestate law.¹ Edgar's name was not even mentioned. However slight his hopes that his guardian might soften, they were now, forever, ended. Thenceforth, poverty must be his lot.

Maria Clemm was now his one support. Then it was, thrown back on the only being in whom he could find protection, that the thought of marrying Virginia must have shaped itself in his mind. Virginia was barely twelve, Edgar twenty-five. This "idyll" which has seemed so poetic to some, doubtless to Mrs. Clemm seemed a convenient arrangement and to Virginia no more than a happy submission to her adored big cousin. For Edgar, marriage to this child held very different attractions, with which we shall deal in detail later.

But Virginia's extreme youth stood in the way of immediate marriage and besides, the Neilson Poes objected. It was therefore decided to postpone the marriage.

The year 1834-1835 was one of dire distress for the little household. *The Tales of the Folio Club*, completed and sent for publication to Carey and Lea of Philadelphia, had not yet appeared, and the few stories printed in newspapers brought little money. A moment came when, in a pathetic letter, Poe confesses to Kennedy, who has invited him to dinner, that he cannot accept, having nothing suitable to wear. His poverty thus revealed, Kennedy immediately came to his succour and provided him with clothes and frequent invitations to meals; finally, supreme courtesy of one Virginian to another, he even lent him his horse.

But the greatest service he did Poe was to recommend him to White, the printer and proprietor of the *Richmond Southern Literary Messenger*.²

¹ *Israfel*, p. 873.

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 8, p. 5.

Baltimore: The First Tales

To him, Poe sent his *Tales*. In March, 1835, White printed *Berenice*, and in April, *Morella*, each with appreciative comment. Poe also sent his first critical articles to White who, admirable in business, yet lacked the literary talent to make his journal a success. In Poe he sensed the man he needed and, as a result, asked him would he be willing to settle in Richmond?

Old Mrs. Poe died on July 7th, 1835. Nothing now retained the household in Baltimore and Edgar could proceed to Richmond to be followed, later, by Virginia and Mrs. Clemm. Thus, towards mid-summer, Edgar left Baltimore.

CHAPTER XV

Richmond: The Southern Literary Messenger

Marriage to Virginia

AT Richmond, Poe stayed some days with the Mackenzies, then moved to the boarding-house of a Mrs. Poore. His life now revolved round the *Messenger* office which adjoined the old offices of Ellis and Allan, or the homes of old friends who made him welcome; the Mackenzies and Galts, Bob Cabell and Rob Stanard. He also sometimes visited Mr. White, his employer, whose literary daughter, Eliza, he seems to have liked. Certain "partisans" of the Allans, it is true, avoided him: but they were only a few. One evening, at a large party given in a house "across the river", Edgar found himself face to face with Elmira. Each was deeply moved but, before they could speak, Mr. Shelton, alarmed, hastened her away.

Meanwhile, alarming news from Baltimore began to reach him, a threat of losing his dearest hope in life, for the Neilson Poes were strenuously opposing his marriage to Virginia and doing their best to get her into their care. Poe, thereupon, fell prey to one of his frequent fits of depression and, as at Charlottesville and West Point, again took to drink.

Mostly he drank at night, in his lodgings, but there were times when he drank before he set out in the morning for the *Messenger* office. Nevertheless, his contributions to the *Messenger* continued prolific, "such as hardly any two men could have been expected to supply".

His despair, at this time, is told in his letter to Kennedy, dated September 11th, 1835.

"My feelings at this moment are pitiable indeed. I am suffering under a depression of spirits such as I have never felt before. I have struggled in vain against the influence of this melancholy—you will believe me when I say that I am still miserable in spite of the great improvement

Richmond: Marriage to Virginia

in my circumstances . . . I am wretched, and know not why. Console me—for you can. But let it be quickly—or it will be too late. Write me immediately. Convince me that it is worth one's while, that it is at all necessary to live, and you will prove yourself indeed my friend. Persuade me to do what is right." . . .¹

In his reply, Kennedy, his best friend and the first person to "understand" him, asked could he not try his hand at "some farces after the manner of the French Vaudeville?" So little idea have men of each other!

Meanwhile, White had discharged him for intemperance; bouts of drinking in which, like all drug addicts, he sought relief from his state of depression and, greatly distressed, Poe returned to Baltimore. It was then that Mrs. Clemm, moved by her loved Eddy's despair, agreed to his immediate marriage. The ceremony took place secretly on September 22nd, 1835, in St. Paul's Episcopal Chapel, with Mrs. Clemm as only witness. This marriage to the thirteen-year-old girl was to prove a calming influence.

Poe, presumably, thereupon wrote to White asking to be taken back on the *Messenger*. White agreed, but his letter of September 29th, though friendly, urges him to "separate himself" from the "bottle". He also stipulates that all engagements on his part would be dissolved the moment Poe got drunk. A few days later Poe was back in Richmond with Virginia and Mrs. Clemm, and took rooms in a boarding-house kept by a Mrs. Yarrington.

Poe's connection with the *Southern Literary Messenger* had increased the number of subscribers from 700 to 5000². In addition, his literary labours had borne extensive fruit. In 1835 alone, he printed in its columns nine tales, four poems, the fragments of *Politian*, many critical notes and editorials and, in addition, thirty-seven reviews of American or European books and periodicals.

The poems were short and of minor importance, such as *To Sarah* (inspired by Elmira), *To Mary* and *The Hymn*; while the tales came mostly from *The Tales of the Folio Club* and dated from Baltimore. Thus, his work on the *Messenger* seems to have dulled his creative gifts, whereas his critical faculties, admired and feared by his contemporaries, were invigorated into life.

In December, 1835, Poe created some stir by a fierce attack on Theodore S. Fay's fashionable but mawkish novel, *Norman Leslie*. Such severity was an innovation in those days and roused the ire of the literary

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 17.

² *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 125; *Israfel*, p. 407, gives this as 3500.

North and, in especial, of those around the northern review the *Knickerbocker*, among whom was Fay. By the same stroke, however, Poe achieved fame. Thenceforth he was to be feared, hated, abused and—admired.

The same month Poe was made editor of the *Messenger* at an annual salary of \$520 which by extra work he increased to \$800. Hunger no longer dogged the little household but they were still far from well off. And though Mrs. Clemm made some efforts to open a boarding-house, any idea of moving had soon to be given up. In February, Carey and Lea returned his *Tales of the Folio Club* and in March, Harper and Brothers also refused them.

A little after, on May 16th, 1836, Poe was officially married to Virginia at Mrs. Yarrington's boarding-house, this time by a Presbyterian minister.¹ Virginia was in travelling clothes and wore a white hat and veil . . . The few guests included White and his daughter, Eliza: the wedding cake had been baked by Mrs. Clemm. Although girls in the South often married young, a sworn statement that the bride was over twenty-one was deemed necessary. This, doubtless given in good faith, was obtained from Thomas Cleland, a friend and fellow boarder of Poe's and a pious Presbyterian. The Rev. Amasa Converse, however, thought the bride seemed surprisingly young.

The honeymoon was spent at Petersburg, in the house of a journalist friend, after which, late in May, we find them once more at Mrs. Yarrington's. Soon after, they moved into a flat on *Seventh Street*, where Mrs. Clemm augmented the family fortunes by lodging boarders and taking sewing.

Though Poe was now well and truly married, he was often from home at the Court House Tavern, after which, racked with pain and remorse, he would return to be "ill" and cared for in bed, at which times Mrs. Clemm would explain that "dear Eddy's health was so bad, he could not get down to the office today". But White was aware of the truth and had now resigned himself to dispensing with his editor, notwithstanding the eighty-three book reviews, the six new or recast poems, the four essays and three tales issued, in the interim, in the *Messenger*; nor the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which he had just begun, nor his article on *Maelzell's Chessplayer*, in which, for the first time, Poe reveals his

¹ Although Poe was brought up as an Episcopalian by the Allans, his family on his father's side were Presbyterians, descendants of Scotch Protestants who found refuge in Ireland in the 17th century.

Richmond: Marriage to Virginia

“analytical” faculties by detecting the human mechanism which activated the apparently mechanical contrivance; nor the *Messenger’s* immense and rapid success in his hands. The two men parted by common consent. Poe’s drunkenness, doubtless, had sorely tried White’s patience and the former may have felt the provinces too narrow for an ambition which had once made him declare, “The world shall be my theatre!”¹ to John Allan. He already dreamt of having his own important review.

Thus, early in 1837, Poe, with Virginia and Mrs. Clemm, left for New York, after selling their chattels.

* * *

It is now time to set ourselves the problem already posited by many who have written Poe’s life: what relations, in fact, existed between the poet and Virginia, his child-wife? For, to ignore them, would be tantamount to abandoning all effort at insight into the forces which determined his work and fate.

Even at Richmond, before she was marked by consumption, the beholder was struck by Virginia’s pallor, in spite of her prettiness and grace. Possibly she already had the disease, contracted at Henry Poe’s bedside. It seems likely, and that Edgar’s deep-rooted and singular attraction towards tubercular women, which in him was no mere fashion of the time, played its part in drawing him to the little cousin whose destiny it also was to die of consumption. Even though Virginia then bore no visible marks of the disease, Poe may have sensed the propensity in her, for the unconscious can always interpret such signs. Thus Poe wedded a woman who might well be consumptive later; a woman with the disease of which, before he was three, his own loved mother had died.

But Virginia stood for yet more than the re-embodiment, though potential, of the mother to whom he remained unconsciously fixated. For she was also a “sister”, a little sister, another Rosalie and, like her, was and remained infantile and mentally undeveloped. Though Rosalie was then twenty-five, she seemed no older than Virginia when the two, with childish cries, skipped or played with the swing in the Mackenzie’s garden. So did Virginia remain all through her short existence. Not without reason did Edgar ever call her anything but “Sis” or “Sissy”. The very frailness of her form seemed to resuscitate his etherealised, ailing mother and little sister, as he had known them when a child. Marrying

¹ *Valentine Museum Poe Letters*, Letter 7.

Virginia, he also married, in Mrs. Clemm, one who would protect and feed him. He called her his "Muddy", as though in honour of her humble tasks.¹

Virginia also answered to Poe's poetic "ideal". Her eyes were large, dark, dewy, and her forehead unusually high, while her raven hair contrasted sharply with her waxen complexion. She had also a strange, unhealthy plumpness which she seems to have kept to the end.² Thus Virginia, physically, was typical of the women in his tales.

Certain biographers, among whom Hervey Allen,³ argue therefrom that Virginia's advent in his life established the mould of his future heroines. True, Berenice (also the cousin of Egæus) is strangely reminiscent of Virginia. But Ligeia is of far different type: at once taller, of more commanding presence, sublimely "learned" and with magnificent eyes. Yet, if Virginia walked in the dread realms where dwelt her husband's dark spirit, it was because another had hewn out a way. It was Ligeia whom the recluse in his tale loved first, and it was he who prepared the sombre nuptial chamber for her successor, the Lady Rowena. Similarly, before Virginia could enter Poe's life and work, Elizabeth Arnold had first to enter it before her.

Besides, although it is true that Poe did not begin to write his tales until with Mrs. Clemm and Virginia in Baltimore, it is clear from his verse, before this time, that his grim heroines already pre-existed in him. Had he not, at West Point, conceived *The Sleeper* and *Lenore* and written that he could not love, but "*where Death—mingled his with Beauty's breath*"?

Yet this fixation to the mother he had known as a child, this love he had forgotten despite its omnipotence which, being unconscious, suffered no depletion, was to have serious consequences on his love-life. For physically, Poe seems to have remained "faithful" to this first love throughout his existence.

Indeed, it was just to preserve this fidelity that Poe married his ailing cousin, though ignorant of the deepest motives that prompted his choice.

Let us now try to picture this marriage from inside.

¹ I do not of course mean to suggest that this verbal association (*i.e.*, with "mud") was a conscious one. It may also be noted that in German, the common diminutive of *Mutter* (mother) is *Mutti*, a word not dissimilar in sound to *Muddy*.

² See page 140, the water-colour sketch made after her death at Fordham; it is the only portrait of Virginia we possess.

³ *Israfel*, p. 388.

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At first, Virginia would be extremely young, too young, he would think, for conjugal relations. He must therefore "respect" her and abstain, an abstention probably accompanied by an enhancement of self-esteem, since few husbands, he would think, were capable of so lofty, so ethereal a love for a wife so devotedly loved! Time passed, but his "respect" would continue, lest he break the heavenly spell cast on Eleanora's lover in *The Valley of the Many-Colored Grass*. Then Virginia fell ill and his "respect" would become duty. Thus, all the physical passion which lacked expression was concentrated into an ever-increasing, exalted adoration of the child-wife. And what were Virginia's feelings in the matter? Who can tell? But she was a child, simple-minded, backward, and seems to have yielded passively to her fate, with its poverty, sickness, nursing and Edgar's "respect". It is said she admired her Eddy, but did not understand him and, in her illness, was grateful for his tenderness and care. Mrs. Clemm, meanwhile, vaunted Eddy's devotion to Sis, and is reported to have said that when he married her, he loved her only "as a dear cousin".¹

That Poe's marriage was never consummated is accepted by several biographers, the first being Woodberry. But while Hervey Allen claims that Poe's opium-habit was the main cause of his "impotence", which drug he first resorted to in Baltimore,² Joseph Wood Krutch, who entirely ignores Poe's drug-habit, considers his "impotence" psychic in origin and the result of his mother-fixation. Though Krutch does not treat this in any detail, it is justly observed³ and seems far likelier than Hervey Allen's theory to illuminate the love-life of Poe.⁴

¹ In the *Newark Courier*, July 19th, 1900, Mrs. Phelps wrote: "Mrs. Clemm, his aunt, was my mother's dear friend. I know something about . . . (the marriage) having *heard my mother and Mrs. Clemm discuss it*. He did not love his cousin, except as a dear cousin, when he married her, but she was fondly attached to him, and was frail and consumptive. While she lived he devoted himself to her with all the ardor of a lover . . ." (*Israfel*, p. 571).

² *Israfel*, pp. 370 ff.

³ Joseph Wood Krutch, *Edgar Allan Poe, A Study in Genius*, (London, Knopf, 1926).

⁴ In *Israfel*, (p. 570 ff.) Hervey Allen also refers to Poe's "psychic inhibition" but makes no further mention of Poe's apparently "normal" behaviour with Mary Devereaux. He does not, however, attempt a more precise analysis and is content to point out that "the difficulty in presenting and understanding Poe and the relation of his personality to his creative work is that his physical and psychic make-up were enormously and peculiarly complex . . . At best . . . (all that one

Poe's Life and Poems

We know, for instance, that at Charlottesville when sixteen, and when twenty-one at West Point, Poe indulged in "orgies". But of what sort? Gambling or drink or both? Yet women are never mentioned. As to his debts, which so infuriated John Allan, not one seems to have arisen through women. In all Poe's army career, whether at Fort Independence, Fort Moultrie or Fortress Monroe, there is not one incident concerning women. Two ideal images, Helen and Elmira, alone held sway over him from the past.

In what degree, however small, did Poe feel physical passion for his Elmira, at fifteen? Perhaps there were some kisses,¹ then "*Hymen and Destiny . . . stalked between*".

After West Point, at Baltimore, Poe and his brother Henry seem half-heartedly to have courted Kate Blakely. But his great love at this time was Mary Devereaux to whom the little Virginia carried his letters.

Following the account Mary herself wrote forty years later, we dealt in some detail with this affair and its result.² Every evening for almost a year, she says, Edgar visited her or they went walking. One moonlit night, it will be remembered, Edgar, in a state of great exaltation, wished to precipitate matters by drawing her to a nearby parsonage to marry her

can say is that) the root of Poe's misfortunes, agony, and shipwreck, as well as his power as a literary artist, lay in some inhibition of his sexual life."

With the more comprehensive attitude of these recent American biographers, may be contrasted that of an Emile Lauvrière, for instance, who in his monumental "study in pathological psychology" consecrated to Poe (*Edgar Poe, sa vie et son œuvre*, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1904, 730 pages) does not touch on the problem of his hero's sexual life—yet one would have thought this of considerable importance to psychology, whether pathological or not! Still more important, the author draws a respectful veil over the whole episode of Virginia and is content, in short, to treat Poe, as was then the fashion, as a "higher degenerate"—a striking example of the lengths to which prudery could, and can, go.

¹ "TO SARAH: The gentle zephyr floating by,
In chorus to my pensive sigh,
Recalls the hours of bliss,
When from thy ruby lips I drew
Fragrance as sweet as Hermia's dew,
And left the first fond kiss."

This youthful poem, of which we quote only one stanza, was inspired by Sarah Elmira Royster, and appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, August, 1835, under the pseudonym of "Sylvio". (After J. H. Whitty, *The Complete Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., pp. 142 and 317.)

² Cf. pages 68-70.

Richmond: Marriage to Virginia

then and there. Mary escaped and went home. Subsequently, he visited her drunk and, after a quarrel, the cause of which she preferred to conceal,¹ she fled for protection to her mother. Mrs. Devereaux then forbade him the house.

From this episode Hervey Allen infers that Poe had behaved like a normal lover and that, when they last met "he intended to have what all men desire".² We cannot say, but he was not put to the test. He behaved, in fact, in such a strange, alarming manner that he was never again allowed in the house. He was so drunk that that, itself, would explain Mary's alarm. For a whole year (assuming Mary did not lengthen the time in retrospect), Edgar was apparently a remarkably docile lover who bowed to her "principles", for she accuses him of not having many. Thus, throughout this time, he gave her no cause for alarm. Then, one evening, soon after wanting immediate marriage, he appeared in a state that "obliged" them to forbid him the house and break off relations. It almost seems as though it were "purposely" done, if such a term can apply to unconscious intent. Baudelaire was not so far wrong as many might think in writing, in connection with another proposed marriage of Poe's, after the death of Virginia, that Poe "used his vice not to betray the poor dead love whose image never left him".³ Baudelaire's statement, however, would be more exact if, in place of "premeditation", as he wrote some lines later, he had written "unconscious intention" and for the "poor dead love whose image never left him" not Virginia, but his loved, lost mother. Virginia had not yet entered Poe's life when, in *A Pean*, he first lauded his lost Lenore, and it was long before her death and even their marriage, that another voice from the dead, in the days of Mary Devereaux, bade him drink of the cup which would spare him the imminent act of love.

This same repetition-compulsion was to follow him through life and always preserve him from carnal love and its challenge. Krutch writes⁴ that if we but knew what woman lay in the tomb which, in *Ulalume*, bars

¹ "We then had a quarrel about whose cause I do not care to speak." (*Israfel*, p. 334.)

² *op. cit.*, p. 336.

³ "il eut recours à son vice pour se débarrasser d'un parjure envers la pauvre morte dont l'image vivait toujours en lui." *Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres*, introduction to *Histoires extraordinaires*, Baudelaire's first translation of Poe's tales.

⁴ *Edgar Allan Poe. A Study in Genius*, p. 62.

the lover's way to that symbol of carnal love, Astarte,¹ we should know the answer to the central enigma of Poe's life. That answer, Krutch himself has divined, for Elizabeth Arnold lies in the vault of *Ulalume*.

Virginia, of all the women in Poe's life, was most fitted to evoke Elizabeth Arnold and unconsciously make him feel that, while loving another, he continued true to his first love.

Firstly, her name was Virginia and in the State of that name he had seen his never-to-be-forgotten mother languish and die; there too, Frances Allan, his second mother, gave him a home and there he knew his "Helen". Again, Virginia was of the same blood, almost a sister, one whom he called his "Sis"; there was a touch of incest about their union. As with his mother, the incest barrier seemed to keep them apart, not as then, because he was too little, but because Virginia, in her turn, was too young. Also, like his mother, Virginia's health was to fail in the flower of her youth and beauty.

The "mother" relived in Virginia as in the second Morella and as, in Rowena, she re-embodied Ligeia. She was fidelity though she seemed a betrayal; a unique star that rose but once on his horizon to save him from disaster for a while.

His health had always been uncertain. At twenty-two, after West Point, we find it totally undermined. Thenceforth, his "weak heart" and nervous "depressions" were to be a constant complaint.

How are we to interpret this "weak heart"? As an organic lesion, neurosis, or both? Or, primarily, to extreme sensitivity to alcohol, as so many witnesses vouch, so that his heart attacks appear to coincide with his drinking bouts? His father, too, was a hard drinker and when William Poe, in a well-known letter,² exhorts Edgar to shun the bottle—"that great enemy to our family"—he, no doubt, had Edgar's father in mind. The effect of alcohol on the germ cell may also have sensitised Poe's organism to the poison, which makes it unnecessary to resort to the legend of his being fed early on gin-soaked bread.³ Poe's alcoholism was hereditary, with all that such an origin organically implies.

As to his fits of "depression", we have only to compare these attacks, as described in his letter to Kennedy,⁴ with his phases of strange excitement,

¹ "She is warmer than Dian"—(*Ulalume*).

² *William Poe to Poe*, June 15th, 1843. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 145.)

³ Cf. page 5, note.

⁴ Cf. pages 74-5..

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to realise his condition as cyclothymic. This manic-depressive constitution, the legacy of impaired heredity, was the fateful ground into which the overwhelming events that occurred in his childhood were to sink roots and grow.

Ever since he was three, in fact, Poe had been doomed by fate to live in constant mourning. A fixation on a dead mother was to bar him forever from earthly love, and make him shun health and vitality in his loved ones. Forever faithful to the grave, his imagination had but two ways open before it: the heavens or the tomb, according to whether he followed the "soul" or body of his lost one. The women in his works, therefore, are always some Nesace or Berenice and they were the women he sought in life. The innocent Virginia, small, consumptive, part-angel and soon dying, came nearest to his sexual ideal and provided the nearest illusion to his having found his lost love. When, however, in other women, who at times attracted him, he saw the living reality through imagination's angelic or funereal mirage, horror made him recoil!

Thus, through his eternal fidelity to the dead mother, Poe, to all intents, became necrophilist. But, unlike Sergeant Bertrand¹, whose early history we unfortunately do not know, Poe's necrophilia had undergone drastic repression. Had it been unrepressed, Poe would no doubt have been a criminal. As it was, while sexually akin to Bertrand, Poe, inhibited as regards the sex-act, became a psychopath and poet and these in the proportions in which he combined the morbid return of what, in him, was repressed, and his artistic sublimation of what must be the hardest to "sublimate" of all love's aspects.

Neurosis, writes Freud, is the negative of perversion. And so, at times, is art.

Poe, it is true, sensed that a fearful "mystery" darkened his soul and existence though, naturally, he could not say what that was. He often spoke of it and with a conviction which marks it as more than a romantic pose. But his worst times were not when he felt dogged by this fearful mystery but when he was depressed; depressions accompanied by sensations of "emptiness", when all was solitude within and without.

These bouts of depression—according to the general mechanism of depression—seem mainly to have been times of *mourning* over the absence of a loved one. Yet, what was this loved being ever present in his soul? It was no longer his mother, for she was forever beyond reach, but her "imago". His love for her had transferred itself to this image he

¹ Cf. page 691, note 1.

carried in his soul or projected on the universe. And it was when the loved, the cherished corpse was no longer present, when it was absent from his sight or inner vision, that Poe, alone and in despair, succumbed to depression.

Some modicum of external reality, of actual presence of the beloved "imago" seem to have been necessary to Poe; hence Virginia's great influence on his existence. At Richmond, in 1835, fearing he might lose his new-found love, he experienced—as he says in his letter to Kennedy—"a depression of spirits such as he had never felt before". And when, later, death bereft him of her and he no longer had her loved, dying form at his side, his own existence also soon drew to its end.

But Virginia was not the only door by which the beloved corpse might return, for there still remained the door of the tomb deep in his soul, like that of the Lady Madeline in the vaults of *The House of Usher*. And it was not when Madeline raised the iron lid of her coffin to emerge, to Roderick's joy and horror, that he was overcome by depression but when she remained buried underground. For that meant absence, emptiness, mourning.

That Virginia's presence helped this return seems clear, for it was in Baltimore, living with his cousin and aunt, that his first tales, including *Berenice* and *Morella*, were written. Even so, in spite of Virginia and the Lady Madeline in her living-tomb, mourning and emptiness, at times, still visited Edgar.

Edgar Allan Poe was a self-confessed dipsomaniac and as we know, an opium addict. But whereas his drunken bouts were obstreperous and public, he did his best to keep his opium-taking secret. Little direct evidence is available regarding Poe's use of the drug, but his cousin, Miss Herring, informs us that, in 1842, Poe took opium when at Philadelphia. About this time

"she had often seen him decline to take even one glass of wine but . . . that, for the most part, his periods of excess were occasioned by a free use of opium. . . During these attacks he was kept entirely quiet, and they did all possible to conceal his faults and failures."¹

Again, Rosalie Poe states that, in 1846, at Fordham, her brother begged them to give him morphine. In 1847 he attempted suicide by laudanum. At Philadelphia, in 1849, he implored Sartain to procure him

¹ Woodberry, (1909), *Poe and Opium*, Vol. II, p. 428. Miss Herring's testimony is quoted from a letter written by Miss Poe to Woodberry, August 28, 1884.

the drug. Thus, Woodberry, discussing the conflicting testimonies regarding Poe's use of opium, is surely justified when he concludes:

"I may state, in a matter of so leading importance, that I incline to the view that Poe began the use of drugs in Baltimore" (evidently between 1831 and 1835) "and that his periods of abstinence from liquor were periods of at least moderate indulgence in opium".¹

Hervey Allen, in *Israfel*, quotes the same sources, but also adduces "moral proofs" of Poe's intermittent opium-taking; namely, the relatively sedentary character of his life in Baltimore and the "opium dream" atmosphere of many of his tales, whose sombre heroes, moreover, themselves use the drug.

The example of Coleridge, whom Poe greatly admired, may also have played its part in making him an "opium eater". It was opium, Hervey Allen claims, which made Poe sexually impotent, since his conduct with Mary Devereaux was still entirely normal. We have already said what we think of this. If Poe, as is probable, resorted to opium, its effects would rather have been to confirm an existing inhibition than create one. Poe did not become impotent through opium, but took it to enable him to remain so, as doubtless do most drug addicts. But this was only one of its benefits to Poe for, as we see from the tales he wrote when, doubtless, under the drug, it was a way of deadening the grief and "mourning" into which he was plunged whenever, in spite of Virginia's presence, the dead love remained unresuscitated.

What we shall never know is how far Virginia's presence served as a channel to evoke it, nor to what point opium was necessary. In any case, opium, for Poe, meant home, family, friendship. His works never speak ill of it: on the contrary they seem to delight in the dream forms and scenes which the subtle, "æsthetic" drug summoned. But whether he took much or little, often or seldom, or swallowed it, as was the fashion, in one form or other, he always refers to it as to a soothing mother, engendering a divine torpor which made him feel like, and so be, as it were, one with the loved corpse for which he forever yearned.

Opium, in fact, established this perfect compromise. It intensely evoked the object on which his grim desires were fixated while depriving him of power to unleash his dire instincts, for his love object remained imaginary while he, the subject, continued impotent and inert before it. Opium, for him, thus opened the dream world of inaction in which our worst instincts may find satisfaction.

¹ Woodberry, *Poe and Opium*, Vol. II, p. 430.

The part played by drink, though related, was very different. Primarily, as is often the case, Poe was a roving drinker. It was always away from home and from the women he loved, or was protected by, that he drank. It will be remembered that his first real drinking bouts occurred after his first separation from his "Ma", when at the University of Virginia. Again, after her death, he began to drink heavily with his chums at West Point. A sole exception, which we do not offer to explain, is that he did not drink in the army. At Richmond, in 1835, when he thought he might lose Virginia, he again started to drink. He even drank after their marriage, in 1836, as though, at times, neither Virginia nor opium could help him. And it was always away from home that he drank and with boon companions,¹ after which, deeply repentant, he always returned to Maria Clemm's tender care.

Drink, for Poe, seems to have served a different end than that served by opium. Whereas the main mission of the latter, while helping him to stay chaste, was to open a way by which to return to the dead woman, imago of the loved mother, drink helped to sustain the same gruesome fidelity in a different manner. In effect, whenever Poe was tempted by living women, drink cleared the way for "flight" and kept him faithful to the dead mother.

Poe thus used drink, as is generally the case, because of a latent homosexuality. He never drank alone, but always with boon companions: when he fled the temptation of women, men were necessary to make him feel safe. When his love for Mary Devereaux threatened his fidelity to the dead woman, he managed to throw Mary off by intoxicating himself with chance-met companions. Again, twice later, we shall see him similarly "fly" to the tavern, to escape women he was going to wed.

There is no record that Poe paid attentions to women either at Charlottesville or West Point, though he drank at both; but as a student, then as a cadet, it is probable that, more or less, he was consciously tempted by women he met.

More contradictory seems the fact that, even after "marriage", Poe needed at times to "fly" from Virginia to the tavern. Yet it is this fact which offers the best key to the nature of his sexuality.

Virginia, when Poe married her, was a pale, fragile thing, in whom the marks of her disease were soon apparent. Thus, she approximated still more closely to the type, which we saw, constituted Poe's sexual ideal.

¹ "Separate yourself from the bottle, and bottle companions, forever." White to Poe, September 29, 1835.

Richmond: Marriage to Virginia

Poe, therefore, in remaining chaste, would do so partly from fidelity to the loved, dead woman and again to defend himself from temptations, sado-necrophilist in kind, which the living and disease-tainted women would evoke, by transference from his original love-object. As Virginia wasted away, such unconscious temptations would intensify. What more natural then that, at times, he should find her blood-spitting and her racking cough intolerable and seek refuge in some tavern where, with other drinkers, *men*, he could feel safe from the gruesome temptations aroused by his wife?

Not without reason, therefore, did Poe flee in horror from sexual commerce with women. Unconsciously, he sensed the danger that the sex act would release his sado-necrophilia and that only permanent chastity could keep it in check. Many have commended the "purity" of his works, but little did his admirers suspect that his total chastity was, doubtless, all that held Poe back from enacting the tragic events described in *The Black Cat*.

As Poe aged, his fits of hypomania, like his depressions, seem to have intensified, despite periods of comparative equilibrium and calm. These depressions, as we said, bore the stamp of mourning for an external or internal inaccessible love-object. But there were times when their characteristic was "nervous exhaustion", due to the struggle in himself against the temptations roused by living women, temptations which always reactivated his dire sado-necrophilist sexuality.

To palliate the former depressions Poe, at Baltimore and after, seems to have preferred opium, while for the latter, drink was his choice.

Drink, in fact, besides enabling him to "fly" from the temptress, woman, to the safety of men, is the sovereign and "male" resource for releasing repressions and, particularly, the aggressive instincts. In Poe, so threatening to women would their liberation have been that, in reaction, he became the tender, chaste, devoted, submissive and angelic husband so often praised. Yet, at times, the task of maintaining these repressions must have proved beyond endurance, whereupon, worn out by the struggle and horribly depressed, he would fly to the nearest tavern.

There, drink, in the safety of men, permitted the release of his repressions and diverted his aggressive instincts into other channels. At times, a single glass would suffice to transform an acute depressive attack into the euphoria of hypomania. Drink would give him the illusion of feeling male and powerful until, racked by pain and remorse, he returned to Mrs. Clemm's care with never-maintained resolutions of abandoning drink for ever.

A strange light is cast on the fits of bitter remorse which followed each of Poe's "fugues" into dipsomania, when we recall that his father David was also an alcoholic whose two "fugues" had had decisive consequences on his life; the first when he fled from home to go on the stage, the second when he abandoned his ailing wife. How often as a child must Edgar have seen his father return drunk and, perhaps, as drunkards do, abuse and maltreat his mother. Then, as always, the child would have sided with her and condemned his father. Doubtless, this occasioned his horror of "fugues" and the condition they produce, and of the drink from which such brutality arises.

But on the other hand, Poe, given the early ripening of his *Œdipus* complex, as often happens with clever children would, at an early age, identify himself with the father and, indeed, at eighteen months he did take his father's place when, in a final "fugue", David Poe deserted his children and their mother.

Only readers unaware of the exact observation open to psycho-analysis will be surprised to find so much importance attached to such early impressions. True, the unconscious, in after years, elaborates these impressions and only then do they reveal their great significance. Yet, often, it is on the babe that these impressions are made and, in Poe's life in particular, none can deny the lasting influence exerted by this father whom he saw for the last time when eighteen months old.

On one hand, we see Poe's horror of resembling his father and remorse whenever he did: on the other, we see his irresistible compulsion to behave in identical manner and imitate his ways as the result of unconscious identification with him. Whence arose an insoluble inner conflict and its concomitant dipsomania, with its alternations between drunkenness and subsequent remorse.¹

Flight from depression, flight from women for fear of betraying one, flight from the temptations aroused by his dire sexuality, identification

¹ Dr. Heinz Hartmann, of Vienna (now New York), tells me that numerous observations show that dipsomaniacs are almost invariably second generation alcoholics. The psychic mechanism described for Poe would therefore seem to be typical of almost all dipsomania. Dr. Hartmann's remark, in fact, formed the point of departure for this part of my psychological analysis of Poe's alcoholism.

Since dipsomania was the form this took, we may possibly assume this as further proof of his father's addiction to drink, which at times has been questioned.

The psychic mechanism here described would, of course, be but a secondary factor in the causation of dipsomania, the primary factor being a constitutional predisposition to a manic-depressive condition.

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with a drunkard father given to "fugues", all these factors nevertheless contributed, despite his fits of remorse, to bring him perpetually back to the tavern.

In any case, we may see the echo of his alcoholic bouts and states of hypomania in his writings. Nor were these periods, as has been said, totally unproductive. Actually, in his work, they coincided mainly with the release of aggressive instincts. The acid critic of the *Southern Literary Messenger* drank as hard at Richmond as the young rebel at Charlottesville or West Point. Later, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, like *The Black Cat*, were to be written between bouts of dipsomania.

Not that I mean to imply that Poe wrote when intoxicated, for he was far too ill at such times.

Virginia, opium, the "fugues", drink, were thus so many weapons Poe used to combat the intolerable depressions to which his manic-depressive constitution, his crushing sense of bereavement and his constant struggle against his repressed and fearful sexuality, condemned him. Yet, had these been his only weapons, the darkness that shadowed the end of his life would doubtless have fallen sooner—and posterity would never have known his name.

For Poe had another "drug" at his call, to keep his strange, unstable, hag-ridden nature from ending in madness or crime—a drug out of reach of most men. This was the ink, with which he eternalized on paper, in his fine, careful hand, the fearsome but comforting "imagos" which at times gave him respite from grief. It is because he achieved, as none before or after, this feat of sublimating in artistic form our soul's darkest and most horrible aspects, its sado-necrophilist urges, that Poe's name, whether unjustly reviled or overpraised by his critics, in its way, remains immortal.

CHAPTER XVI

New York and Philadelphia

Burton's Gentleman's Magazine

Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque

IT was late in February, 1837, when Poe, with Virginia and Mrs. Clemm, reached New York, a city in which they had neither relations nor friends. At first they lodged in a dilapidated old house on *Sixth Avenue*, sharing a floor with a Scotch bookseller named Gowans. They soon moved, however, to *Carmines Street*, where Mrs. Clemm was able to take a few lodgers, among whom Gowans. The latter has left an idyllic picture of this time, showing us a sober, "courteous and gentlemanly" Poe, full of attentions for his "mother" and wife, whose eyes matched "those of any houri". Virginia, then, seems to have sufficed to soothe his anxiety, while his thoughts found content in their twilight walks in St. John's churchyard hard by.

Although, as a name, he was already known in New York, the young critic found it difficult to obtain employment, the country's economic structure being so undermined by President Jackson's financial policy that many newspapers and magazines had been forced to close down.

Freed from his editorial tasks, Poe now finished *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*,¹ his only long work of fiction. This, he had begun at Richmond, following an idea thrown out by Paulding² that "a Tale in a couple of volumes" was the magic key to success.

This compilation compounded from many sources, interspersed with

¹ *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, New York, Harper and Bros., 1838.

² Paulding to Poe, March 17th, 1836. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 31.)

terrifying adventures and reminiscences of his own, set against backgrounds only Poe could invent, is of the greatest interest to the student of his psychology and we shall return to it in the second part of this work. For the moment, we may note how strong a hold was exerted on him by the sea and the South Pole.

Once before, in his *MS. Found in a Bottle*, a ghost ship worthy of *The Ancient Mariner* had been swallowed into an antarctic whirlpool, while a similar fascination for whirlpools was to inspire his nightmare *A Descent into the Maelström*. It need not therefore surprise us to learn that Poe's imagination had been fired by news of a projected Antarctic expedition, conceived by one Reynolds, with the object of correcting the charts of the whaling grounds and adjacent regions. Even in August, 1836, we find Poe launching a glowing appeal for Reynolds in the *Messenger*, in the name of that Science he abused in an earlier sonnet. But he now felt differently about Science, as we shall see. Later, in January 1837, the *Messenger* devoted another enthusiastic article to Reynolds, the men, in the interim, seeming to have met.¹ This enthusiasm for Reynolds is worthy of note, in view of the name's importance in the poet's last hours.

What was the spell cast over Poe by the South Pole and Antarctic ocean and what, deep in his unconscious, did they, as symbols, represent? That the sea is an ancient, universal symbol of the mother, we know, and one that has its phylogenetic justification. We also saw how deeply he yearned for the lost mother. Nevertheless, this mother was invested with dread attributes: death, immobility and cold. Thus, the frozen, white Polar seas would speak to him above all others. We now see why Poe so entirely identified himself with *Arthur Gordon Pym* who, in thought, conquers these seas as Reynolds, in fact, sought to do.

Meanwhile, neither money nor fame came to Poe. Though extracts from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* appeared in the *Messenger*, and the tale itself was published both in London and New York, poverty dogged him as relentlessly as ever. Yet, slight as is our knowledge of this time, we know that the winter of 1837 was unusually severe, that the little household suffered greatly from cold and that, once more, Poe fell into debt. Gowans helped so far as his small means allowed and also made him acquainted with an Englishman named Pedder, a writer of stories for the young. Doubtless, it was he who induced Poe to journey to Philadelphia in the summer of 1838, he having decided to move there himself.

Most American publishing at this time was concentrated in

¹ Cf., for both articles, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 9, pp. 84 and 306.

Philadelphia. Here Benjamin Franklin had settled after Boston, bringing the most up-to-date English printing presses and types, and here lithography first came into use in America, a process destined to revolutionise the illustrator's art.

The city also numbered many periodicals which prospered or decayed, but always rose from their ashes under new names. Poe, as a youth, must have thumbed them often in Ellis and Allan's offices. Now, a reputed critic, he found himself at the hub of the magazine world, its only rivals New York and Boston.

In 1838, Philadelphia could count several of the country's leading periodicals. And at Richmond, with the *Messenger's* success, Poe had conceived the idea of founding and editing a first-class review of his own. For this, however, he lacked the money and, poverty pressing hard, had to content himself with compiling a handbook.¹

This task was, doubtless, offered him by Pedder, which may have been the latter's reason for persuading Poe to leave New York. The story is curious and worth relating. Some time earlier Harper and Bros. had published a *Manual of Conchology* by Thomas Wyatt, but the coloured plates proved so costly that the publishers declined to issue a second edition. Wyatt then thought of reissuing the work in a more popular edition and engaged Poe, as a "brilliant and necessitous litterateur", to prepare and issue it under his own name. Thus, Poe, naturalist for the nonce, in collaboration with Isaac Lee and Thomas Wyatt, and with many borrowings from Cuvier, compiled the handbook. Poe's plates, as well as the preface, introduction and notes on the shells, were drawn from an English publication; Capt. Thomas Brown's *Conchologists' Text-Book*. Poe's version, signed by himself, eventually appeared in April 1839, in Philadelphia, and ran through nine editions. There seems some doubt as to what it brought him, apart from a name as a plagiarist, and the later refusal of Harper and Bros. to publish his collected works.²

In extenuation, be it said that he and his family, at this time, often went hungry. Man must live and Poe, lacking employment, had no resources save the odd sale of a story or poem.

We know little of Poe's early days in Philadelphia, nor do we know how he first met Burton. In May 1839, however, we find him engaged

¹ *The Conchologist's First Book, or, A System of Testaceous Malacology*, Philadelphia, Haswell, Barrington & Haswell, 1839.

² Hervey Allen speaks of a payment of \$50 made by Wyatt to Poe for the use of his name. (*Israfil*, p. 442.)

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as part-time editor of Burton's *The Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly Review* at \$10 a week; the same wage as when he started work with the *Messenger*.

Burton was an Englishman who had begun life as a comedian and impresario, and claimed to be a graduate of St. John's College, Cambridge. His recently founded magazine had met with success, in spite of the financial panic. Genial and rotund, something of a bully, something of a clown, Burton made Poe's acquaintance over a slice of mutton.¹

Soon after, without consultation, Burton printed Poe's name beside his own as co-editor on the cover of the July issue, whence arose a first difference between the two men, for Poe had no desire to identify himself as closely with Burton's magazine as with the *Messenger*, since he still intended to launch a journal of his own.

Nevertheless, the following contributions did appear from his pen to cast a sudden glow on its otherwise dull columns: *The Man That was Used Up*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *William Wilson*, *Morella*, *The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion*,² together with some slight reviews and revisions of earlier poems.

To take him at his word, Poe at this time had given up drinking.³ But this in no way placated his employer, who chose to blame drink for Poe's unreliable attendance at the office. Poe, indeed, did frequently absent himself, being busy with secret schemes for launching his own *The Penn Magazine* and preparing his first collection of stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, for publication by Lea and Blanchard.

Meanwhile, the last of his hero-types, the "infallible ratiocinator", was taking shape in his mind, apparently as a reaction-formation to the fears of approaching madness which may be discerned in *The Haunted Palace* written at this time. Poe first proclaimed his interest in cryptograms in the Spring of 1839, and in January 1840 we find him, in

¹ "I shall dine at home today at three. If you will cut your mutton with me, good." (Burton to Poe, May 10th, 1839, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 45.)

² *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*: Issues of August, September, October, November and December, 1839, respectively.

³ Poe to Dr. Snodgrass, Philadelphia, April 1, 1841 . . . "I pledge you, before God, the solemn word of a gentleman, that I am temperate even to rigor. From the hour in which I first saw this basest of calumniators" (Burton) "to the hour in which I retired from his office in uncontrollable disgust at his chicanery, arrogance, ignorance and brutality, *nothing stronger than water ever passed my lips*."

Mrs. Clemm also stated that Poe took no wine during the years in question. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, pp. 160-161.)

Alexander's *Weekly Messenger*, challenging "the universe" to provide a cypher he cannot solve. Although the universe reached by this weekly numbered but a few hundred readers, the deciphering of the cryptograms sent in doubtless absorbed a certain amount of Poe's time. Burton, meanwhile, was secretly seeking to sell his magazine with a view to buying a theatre and returning to his first profession.

We do not know which first discovered the other's secret, but early in 1840 we find them at odds, Burton having suggested, to gain contributors, that a literary competition be held, although he had no intention of paying the money prizes. Poe's protests, however, were vain. Soon, Burton's efforts to sell his magazine reached Poe, and those of Poe to found *The Penn* reached Burton. Burton thereupon accused Poe of using his subscribers' lists, and Poe accused Burton of intending to leave him penniless, without warning.

Frequently absent as Burton was in his search for a theatre, the whole work of the magazine now devolved upon Poe, though nothing was added to his salary. Poe, in protest, therefore also absented himself from the office. Thus, returning one evening from New York, Burton, to his surprise, found his office piled high with manuscripts and unopened letters. Thereupon, in a rage, he bundled the whole into a cab and drove to the home of a Mr. Rosenbach, whose son relates the episode. There Burton spent the night opening the mail and selecting manuscripts for the next issue.¹

Although it appeared on the appointed day, Poe never re-entered the doors of the "Gent's Mag", as he termed it.

A correspondence ensued in which Poe set forth his claims against Burton. As to his "long articles", these Burton had rejected as "inadmissible" so that "of course" he had grown "discouraged, and could feel no interest in the journal".² Poe at this time was suffering from one of his "nervous collapses", which once more he sought to cure by drinking . . . cider.³

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 470-471.

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 166.

³ "After my leaving Burton . . . I was induced to resort to the occasional use of cider, with the hope of relieving a nervous attack." (Continuation of letter to Dr. Snodgrass of April 1, 1841.)

It is possible that Poe here post-dates the period at which he resorted to cider. In an undated letter, Burton urges him to "rouse his energies" against his morbid state of mind, an indication that, while still connected with Burton, Poe had again begun to experience the depression from which he sought refuge in drink.

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Late in 1839, Poe, with his family, moved to a small house in *Coates Street* which looked on to Architect Browne's fantastic "Pagoda" on the bank of the Schuylkill River, a home more comfortable than any he had known since with the Allans. The country was pleasant and the nearby river, when his health allowed, permitted the indulgence of favourite exercises and sometimes of shooting water-fowl with friends. There were evenings, too, when Virginia would sing his favourite ballads in her clear soprano. Weak though she was, she nevertheless tended their little garden with its fruit trees and flowers. Muddy, as ever the perfect housewife, saw that the house was neat and clean. They may already have had their cat, Catterina, though it would then have been a kitten.

Here, in December 1839, Poe at last saw his first stories appear as *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, Philadelphia (Lea and Blanchard; 1840).

In the preface to these twenty-five tales, Poe defends himself against the charge that he could write only of "terror". "The epithets 'Grotesque' and 'Arabesque' " he says

"will be found to indicate with sufficient precision the prevalent tenor of the tales here published. But from the fact that, during a period of some two or three years,¹ I have written five-and-twenty short stories whose general character may be so briefly defined, it cannot be fairly inferred—at all events, it is not truly inferred—that I have, for this species of writing, any inordinate, or indeed any peculiar taste or prepossession. I may have written with an eye to republication in volume form, and may, therefore, have desired to preserve, as far as a certain point, a certain unity of design. This is, indeed, the fact; and it may even happen that, in this manner, I shall never compose anything again. I speak of these things here, because I am led to think it is this prevalence of the 'Arabesque' in my serious tales, which has induced one or two critics to tax me, in all friendliness, with what they have pleased to term 'Germanism' and gloom. The charge is in bad taste, and the grounds of the accusation have not been sufficiently considered. Let us admit, for the moment, that the 'phantasy-pieces' now given *are* Germanic, or what not. Then Germanism is 'the vein' for the time being. To-morrow I may be anything but German, as yesterday I was everything else. These many pieces are yet one book. My friends would be quite as wise in taxing an astronomer with too much astronomy, or an ethical author of treating too largely of morals. But the truth is that, with a single exception, there is no one of these stories in which the scholar should recognize the distinctive features of that

¹ Actually, nine.

species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic, for no better reason than that some of the secondary names of German literature have become identified with its folly. If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul—that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results.

"There are one or two of the articles here (conceived and executed in the purest spirit of extravaganza), to which I expect no serious attention, and of which I shall speak no farther. But for the rest I cannot conscientiously claim indulgence on the score of hasty effort. I think it best becomes me to say, therefore, that if I have sinned, I have deliberately sinned. These brief compositions are, in chief part, the results of matured purpose and very careful elaboration."¹

I have quoted this preface in its entirety because nothing Poe ever wrote shows more clearly his deliberately literary attitude to his "gloom". Not for a moment, he claims, does it dominate him: on the contrary, he only desired to "preserve . . . a certain unity of design" by confining himself to sombre colours. And it may happen that he will never again compose anything in this manner, though this, in fact, was what he was never able to do. Later, in *The Philosophy of Composition*, writing of *The Raven*, he likewise affirmed that every element in that famous poem—every line, word and syllable, metre and form, idea and image, was the product of conscious volition and that, not for a moment, had inspiration swept him away. Such was his need to convince others and partly, himself, of his sanity and that no dark forces ruled his soul and inspiration. Whence, too, his pose as the "infallible ratiocinator" and ever-increasing claims, as his reason, more and more, threatened to fail.

Nevertheless, the preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* discloses the truth, a truth which, at times, he inadvertently revealed, as when he writes: "that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul". If these tales, as Poe well says, differed essentially from the "pseudo-horror" of the then fashionable German school, it was because they were nowise imitative, while the terror animating them issued from "legitimate sources" in the author's soul.

Also at *Coates Street*, Poe was to prepare his prospectus for *The Penn Magazine*, summarising, in short, his critical and literary theories. Here, too, in Spring 1840, he was visited by F. W. Thomas of St. Louis, a young author-poet who also edited a magazine, and with whom he was to develop the closest relations. Thomas had hip disease and was more or less

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, pp. 150-151.

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crippled. He had been friendly with Henry Poe in Baltimore, when Edgar was soldiering, and they had loved the same girl. All this doubtless helped Poe to establish a "brother transference" to Thomas. Thomas, who was electioneering for the old whig, Harrison, then standing for President, and seeking to capture the young vote on his behalf, persuaded Poe to join him in composing some political songs.

Poe's final contribution to Burton's *Gentleman's Magazine* was his latest instalment of the anonymous *Journal of Julius Rodman* which appeared in the issue for June 1840.

In October, Burton sold his magazine to George R. Graham, owner of a colourless monthly named *Atkinson's Casket*. The bargain concluded, "there is one thing more," said Burton. "I want you to take care of my young editor". Thus, late in 1840, we find Poe employed by Graham.

CHAPTER XVII

Philadelphia

Graham's Magazine : Fears For Virginia

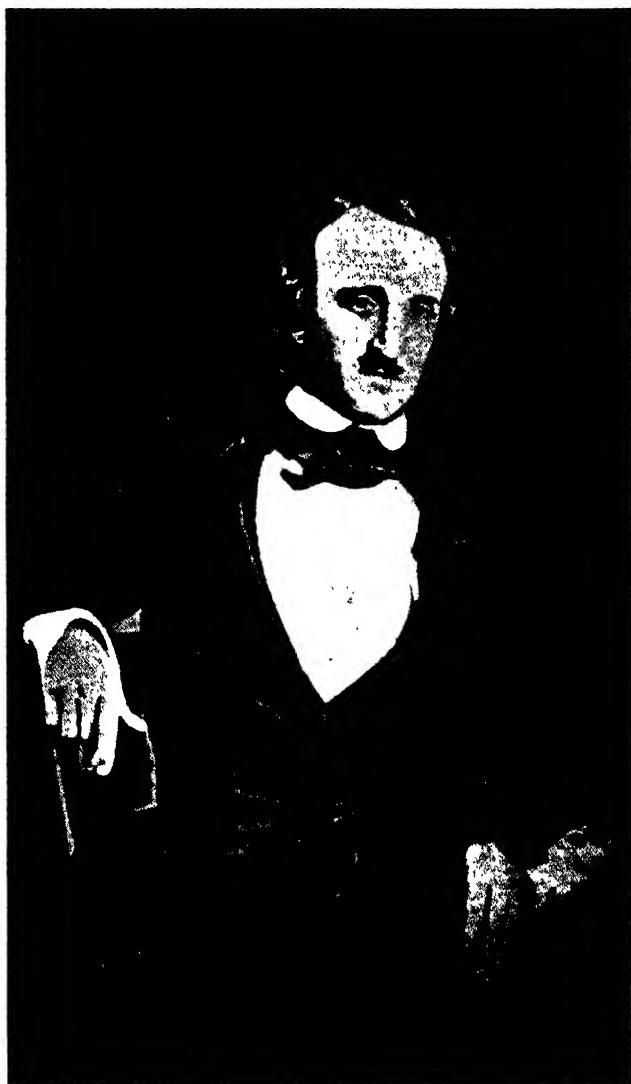
GEORGE REX GRAHAM (1813-1894) son of a once-prosperous Philadelphia merchant, was put early to cabinet-making: later he studied law, and in 1839 was admitted barrister. Soon after he became editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* and owner of *Atkinson's Casket*. In 1841, merging Burton's *The Gentleman's Magazine* with the *Casket*, he founded *The Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine* (*Graham's Magazine*).

Graham was a man of great energy and ambitious views, who intended to launch a magazine of far wider appeal than even the Boston *North American Review* and the New York *Knickerbocker*. He proposed to print several thousand copies of each issue and intended this magazine, for the first time, to reach the general public.

Poe was exactly the collaborator he needed and Graham would doubtless have turned to him even without Burton's recommendation. Poe, for his part, still lacked the wherewithal to start *The Penn*. He therefore agreed to work with Graham but made no secret of his cherished plans. Their agreement covered the possible mutual launching of *The Penn*, failing which Graham was to give Poe an interest in *Graham's*.

At the outset Poe was to be free to decide the magazine's literary trends. He himself would contribute what stories, poems, criticisms or essays he pleased and obtain contributions from America's foremost writers. There was one drawback, however, for whereas Graham had introduced a new liberality into magazine rates by paying Longfellow \$50 for a poem and even artists \$200 for a single illustration, his associate's salary, on whom the success of the enterprise depended, was fixed at an annual \$800.

Now, almost every morning, Poe would walk the length of the town to his office at *Graham's*, shared with the assistant editor, Charles J. Peterson. Every morning, too, Mr. and Mrs. Graham would drive to the



EDGAR ALLAN POE
1840
(from a daguerreotype)

Philadelphia: Fears for Virginia

office. The former would then dash up the three flights of stairs to open the post and remove the increasingly frequent bank notes, best testimonies to the journal's growing popularity. Poe would look on as the notes disappeared into his employer's pockets. His own task was merely to stay at his desk while Peterson sat at another and, for the rest of the day, answer letters, obtain contributions, select manuscripts, see them through the press and write as much as possible himself for \$800.

By July 1841 the subscribers to *Graham's*, under Poe's guidance, had risen from 5,000 to 20,000 and were doubled the next year. Its income for the first six months was \$60,000 and at the end of the year the net profit was \$15,000. No such success had ever been known in American magazine publishing. Poe's stipend, however, continued unchanged. Not that Graham was ill-natured or disliked his editor, but it never occurred to him to offer a share of profits all the pleasanter for being unshared.

Nevertheless, Graham was generous with his sudden wealth and rising fame and the two men continued on friendly terms. At times the Poes went driving with the Grahams, or Mrs. Graham would take Virginia on her shopping expeditions. Graham kept open house and Poe met many authors and painters at his frequent dinners and suppers, among whom Thomas Sully, Sartain, N. P. Willis, Thomas Dunn English and the remarkable the Rev. Rufus Griswold, destined to be his worst detractor in life.

At these dinners the talk was brilliant and the wines excellent, for Graham's house in Arch Street, by a recently cut door, communicated with the premises of the wine merchant, Elijah Van Sychel: thus the choicest wines could pass straight from his cellar to Graham's board. Nevertheless, temptation lay in wait for Poe in the luxury of Graham's household. True, this was no tavern nor bar-room company, but Graham's guests, like his old Richmond friends, represented a form of drinking abroad with bosom cronies.

Small wonder that Mrs. Clemm was worried, or that she sat many a night in Graham's kitchen waiting for Eddy, while he sat on late with the guests at Graham's table.

Nevertheless, Hervey Allen writes: "It seems certain that the year 1841 was one of the times when Poe was most free from his besetting troubles, poverty, and the depressed physical state due to the use of stimulants."¹ Yet his next page describes Graham's dinners and notes

¹ *Israfel*, p. 488.

what temptation there must have meant for Poe. Later, he observes that *The Colloquy of Monos and Una*, written at this time, suggests the influence of opium in its description of the supernatural immobility in which, after death, Monos lies suspended. This, however, may have been a remembered sensation, not one newly experienced. Be that as it may, these glimpses of opium or drink only faintly adumbrated what was to follow.

In any case, 1841 is a great date in Poe's writing career for it marks the birth of his last hero, the detective Dupin, forerunner of Sherlock Holmes.

Meanwhile Poe, as the "infallible reasoner", had gone on increasing his claims. In 1841 Poe had defied the "universe" to send in a cypher he could not solve. Also, that February, reviewing *Barnaby Rudge*, then appearing serially, he had correctly predicted how it would end. Dickens is said to have exclaimed, "The man must be the devil!"—a tribute in which Poe, doubtless, took no little pride. Now, fusing both opposing currents of his nature, that which emerged from his innermost depths laden with direst "horrors", and that which was its resistance, he wrote *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Thus 1841 was a year of great literary activity and comparative prosperity for Poe.

Nevertheless, he remained discontented. Appear how it might, he was still in a subordinate position which he found difficult to endure. "To coin one's brain into silver, at the nod of a master, is to my thinking the hardest task in the world", he wrote that summer to Thomas.¹ He thus became more than ever anxious to achieve his cherished project of *The Penn* and in letters to Longfellow or Halleck, on behalf of *Graham's*,² would solicit contributions to his own forthcoming magazine. For the same reason, President Tyler having succeeded old General Harrison, he welcomed Thomas's offer to approach Tyler's son, with a view to securing him a Government position, and so freeing him from financial stress. But the year ended with nothing settled as regards this position, or his plans in connection with *The Penn*.

As we said, the house in *Coates Street* was the most comfortable the family had yet known. The countryside was delightful and a wise employment of Poe's means had procured some interior comforts; a few purplish

¹ Poe to Thomas, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 94.

² op. cit., pp. 86 ff.

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carpets, curtains, four-poster beds, flower-painted chairs, a Chinese porcelain dinner-service and, for Virginia, a small piano and harp.

Here, in 1842, on a late January evening, the little household entertained some cousins, the Herrings. Mrs. Clemm had gone out to prepare coffee and Catterina had followed at her heels. The cage had been covered, the birds were asleep and a cheerful fire burnt in the grate. Virginia, in white, was asked to sing. Taking her place at the harp, she raised her eyes and her clear soprano soared into song. Everything she knew, her little music and her French, she had learnt from Poe. Whenever she sang, he would listen spellbound. But suddenly, this evening, her voice broke, her hands went to her throat and blood spurted over her white robe.

All ran to her side. She was carried upstairs and laid on her bed. While her mother applied wet towels, Edgar, distracted, hastened to the doctor.

Dr. Mitchell lived on the further side of the town. He returned with Poe but now had two invalids to tend, each with a different ailment. For not in vain had Elizabeth Arnold issued from the tomb that night to be re-embodied in Virginia, even to the blood which, to her son, brought back those hæmoptyses of old; blood which, before it reddened Virginia's dress, had stained the shroud of the Lady Madeline.

From that moment, Poe's "flights" into drink multiplied beyond measure.

He describes the state into which he now lapsed in a letter to Eveleth, dated January 4th, 1848.

"You say, 'Can you *hint* to me what was the "terrible evil" which caused the "irregularities" so profoundly lamented?' Yes, I can do more than hint. This "evil" was the greatest which can befall a man. Six years ago, a wife, whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. Her life was despaired of. I took leave of her forever, and underwent all the agonies of her death. She recovered partially, and I again hoped. At the end of a year, the vessel broke again. I went through precisely the same scene. Then again—again—and even once again, at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death—and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity. But I am constitutionally sensitive—nervous in a very unusual degree. I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank—God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity. I had, indeed, nearly abandoned all hope of a permanent cure, when I

found one in the *death* of my wife. This I can and do endure as becomes a man. It was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could *not* longer have endured, without total loss of reason. In the death of what was my life, then, I receive a new, but —Oh God!—how melancholy an existence.”¹

Virginia had been dead a year when Poe wrote this letter, but we shall see he was wrong in thinking himself cured. Yet he was right as regards his drinking, to some extent at least, when he said that his enemies were mistaken in referring his “insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity”. This, drink and drug-addicts have always instinctively known, whereas medicine has only realised it lately.

Nowadays, it is increasingly accepted that mental instability is the forcing ground for the drink or drug-habit. It is not open to everyone to become a true morphinist or dipsomaniac. Habit alone will not suffice for, if instability is absent, mere acquaintance with the drug will not establish the habit. Medicine to-day, therefore, judges Poe far more fairly than his contemporaries, who reproached him or were shocked, according as to whether they were enemies or friends.

Yet medical science to-day is as nonplussed as was Poe's intuition to explain the underlying reasons why he would be seized by such ungovernable urges to fly for refuge to the tavern, and especially when at Virginia's bedside. He himself puts it down to the anguish he suffered, to his horrible fears of losing her again and above all, to his never-ending oscillation between hope and despair. And this will suffice the average reader, moved by the tragic tale, whereas our efforts to provide a psycho-analytic explanation will seem extremely far-fetched and even cruelly unjust to the despairing husband.

Baudelaire, however, wrote long ago:

“It is easy enough, for that matter, to suppose that a man so truly solitary and so profoundly unhappy (as Poe) . . . it is natural . . . to suppose that this poet . . . at times, sought the luxury of forgetfulness in the bottle. Literary animosities, the vertigos inspired by the cosmos, misery at home and poverty's lash—from all these Poe fled into the night of drunkenness, as though into a premature tomb. *But however sound this explanation may seem, I do not find it sufficiently inclusive, and distrust it because so deplorably simple.*”²

¹ Poe to—[Ingram]. *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 287. According to Hervey Allen this letter was to Eveleth. (*Israfel*, p. 521.)

² “Il est d'ailleurs facile de supposer qu'un homme aussi réellement solitaire, aussi profondément malheureux . . . il est naturel . . . de supposer que ce poète

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Such over-simplification, indeed, seems equally "deplorable" to us. We shall not therefore yield our own hypothesis in its favour, especially since we feel ours must convince those at all familiar with depth psychology.

If Poe, at every crisis in Virginia's illness, loved her the more, it was not so much because each threatened him with her loss, but because every crisis, every hæmoptysis, deeply reactivated his terrible unconscious infantile memories and converted Virginia into an ever more lifelike and, as it were, superimposed portrait of his dying and never forgotten mother. And if, then, he sought respite in drink from his intolerable anxiety, it was because that anxiety arose not so much from sorrow, as from the terrible temptations which—given his sado-necrophilist drives—Virginia would rouse in him at such times.

That Poe was a potential sado-necrophilist all his work shows and only his most purely literary devotees would deny it. Lauvrière, in his work on Poe, well realised this, though with no inkling, naturally, of its infantile roots. Given these circumstances, it must be admitted that Poe had good reason to fly from his dying wife and her hæmorrhages, for she then realised his sexual ideal.

And now we shall see where these flights led.

Late in 1841, in Philadelphia, Poe became acquainted with an attractive young man, Henry Beck Hirst, who was both an author and a law student. A friendship thereupon sprang up between the men, both being interested in the international copyright position. There was then no copyright convention between England and America and many English authors were pirated by American publishers. This not only deprived them of royalties, but enabled these publishers to flood the market with cheap books, which all but excluded the American author. Charles Dickens was to discuss this deplorable position with Poe during his visit to America in the Spring of 1842. Poe was himself a victim of this state of affairs and, encouraged by Hirst, even entered himself as a law student.

But other ties drew the two men together and, early in 1842, Hirst had become Poe's nearest friend. It was with him that, after Virginia's first

... ait cherché parfois une volupté d'oubli dans les bouteilles. Rancunes littéraires, vertiges de l'infini, douleurs de ménage, insultes de la misère, Poe fuyait tout dans le noir de l'ivresse comme dans une tombe préparatoire. *Mais quelque bonne que paraisse cette explication, je ne la trouve pas suffisamment large, et je m'en défie à cause de sa déplorable simplicité.*" (Author's italics). Edgar Poe, *Sa vie et ses œuvres*, introduction to *Histoires extraordinaires*.

hæmorrhage, he roamed the streets and taverns. Hirst drank hard and was a connoisseur of brandy.

On these wanderings they were often accompanied by a certain George Lippard. Lippard was both a dandy and eccentric, who wore long hair and a tight-waisted blue coat with a velvet collar. At night he slept in an immense deserted structure whose hundred bare rooms housed the homeless. His bed was the floor and his carpet-bag his pillow. There he would revel in spectral imaginings. He had christened this retreat "Monks' Hall" and was writing a gruesome novel peopled with grinning skeletons and coffins that cast shadows on moonlit floors. Such was the manner in which Anne Radcliffe's extravaganzas were wafted from Europe to America.

With them, at times, was a fourth: the engraver Sartain, an absinthe-drinker. There were times when the four drank so late in taverns that, greatly to Mrs. Clemm's despair, Poe would stay out all night.

Hirst, as we said, was Poe's nearest friend and poetry was a frequent subject. Poe also read him the first versions of *The Raven*. Years later, ruined by drink and his memory failing, Hirst even claimed that famous poem as his own. Later also, each was to accuse the other of plagiarism—an accusation always ready to Poe's hand—when their first love for each other, following the classic mechanism known to every psycho-analyst, had changed into delusions of persecution. As yet, however, their affection was unclouded.

Thus, to escape the dire temptation to his fearful sex drives aroused by the sight of his poor Virginia's hæmorrhages and the sound of her racking cough, Poe first took refuge in friendship with a man, a friendship he could "chastely" enjoy in alcoholic libations.

We must, however, make clear to those unfamiliar with psycho-analysis that, when we say Poe took refuge with men from his fearful sex drives, we nowise imply that he was overtly homosexual. As is the general rule with all hard drinkers, the homosexuality he gratified with boon companions was latent but deep-rooted. That was why Hirst and the tavern represented safety when, by his dying Virginia's bed, his instincts alarmed him only too justly.

Only if thus regarded can we throw light on the curious relations between Poe and Griswold.

Born in 1815, Rufus Griswold had been early apprenticed to a printer-publisher; later he turned to theology and became a Baptist minister. He soon, however, abandoned this unlucrative profession and returned to literature. In 1841, when they first met at Graham's, Griswold was the



RUFUS W. GRISWOLD
(from an engraving)

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best-known anthologist in America and was preparing his ambitious publication, *Poets and Poetry of America*. He was familiar, more or less, with the lives and works of every major and minor American author and poet, and his verdicts were shrewd and often malicious.

Wishing to figure in his anthology, Poe sought him out and Griswold subsequently included *The Haunted Palace*. At this time, they seem to have been very friendly, although it was doubtless as difficult for Poe to forgive Griswold his lukewarm appreciation as for Griswold to pardon Poe's obvious scorn of his insipid verses.

Meanwhile, owing to his "fugues" with Hirst, Poe's attendance at the office had become irregular, and the brunt of the work, therefore, fell on Peterson. This, finally, in April, led to an open quarrel between them in Graham's presence. Later, Graham told Sartain that "either Peterson or Poe would have to go—the two could not get along together".¹ Drink, once more, had released Poe's aggression.

Later the same month, Poe returned to Graham's after an absence of some days, only to find Griswold in his chair. He thereupon turned on his heel and never again entered the premises. For a long time he bore a grudge against his successor. Later, the men were rivals in love. Nevertheless, before his death, Poe appointed Griswold his literary executor, a task which he performed in the venomous manner we know. Thus, from this brief outline, we gain some idea how complex were the mysterious bonds which attached Poe, primarily, to his "persecutors". To this we shall later return.

Drink, thus again, had cost Poe his position and removed his means of support for, far more imperative than his obligations, was his need to fly from the dire and unconscious temptations evoked in him by the dying Virginia; temptations amply revealed by his works at this time.

It was no chance that he depicted, evidently soon after Virginia's first hæmoptysis, the reeking scarlet background of *The Masque of the Red Death*. "The Red Death had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its avatar and its seal—the redness and horror of blood." And thus he continues, with the same lavish hand, in a paroxysm of sadistic and æsthetic delectation. Nor was it chance that Poe's only tale of a crime frankly sexual, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, should be written at this time nor, again and more important, that he should conceive *The Black Cat* at the dying Virginia's bedside, while Virginia drew warmth from the cat, Catterina, curled on her bosom.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 530.

Of this period, too, are *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Gold-Bug*. Later, in our analysis of this last, we shall show how Virginia's hæmorrhages helped to reactivate memories of the Carolina coast which he had visited with his sick mother when a child, long before he returned there as a soldier.

His work, for Poe, was a way of "nobly" fleeing from temptation, though it allowed him to indulge that temptation safely in intense, sublime absorption. But even that left him insecure and then he fled to drink and his drinking cronies. Yet this, in its turn, at times hardly sufficed him. There were other avenues of escape. One even led to normal healthy women and that, could he have followed it through, might well have proved his salvation.

Thus it need not surprise us to find him suddenly, one day in the Spring or Summer of 1842, on board the ferryboat plying between New York and Jersey City, when we learn that the now wedded Mary Devereaux lived in that place. Poe was drunk and hatless and had also "forgotten" Mary's address although, before starting, he had obtained it in New York. Wild and haggard, he went on pacing the deck as the ferry plied to and fro, always asking the passengers—who imagined him mad—for Mary Devereaux's address. At last it was given him and here is Mary's account of his visit:¹

"When Mr. Poe reached our house I was out with my sister, and he opened the door for us when we got back. We saw that he was on one of his sprees, and he had been away from home for several days. He said to me, 'So you have married that cursed —! Do you love him truly? Did you marry him for love?' I answered him, 'That's nobody's business; that is between my husband and myself.' He then said, 'You don't love him. You do love me. You know you do.' "

Poe then took tea, a single cup, with the two young women. He was in a condition of great excitement and, seizing a knife and dish of radishes, proceeded to slice them into a hundred morsels with truly sadistic delight. He insisted on Mary singing his favourite song, "Come, rest in this bosom" and, afterwards, vanished.

Later, Mrs. Clemm, half-crazed with anxiety, reached Mary's house in search of Eddy, having managed to trace him there. Neighbours came to their aid and searched the countryside. Poe was discovered in the woods bordering the town, "wandering about like a crazy man". Nothing

¹ *Israfel*, p. 533.

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had passed his lips since the cup of tea a few days before. With Mrs. Clemm, he then returned to Philadelphia.

Nothing is more characteristic than this "fugue" in which Poe fled to Mary for safety from the temptations aroused in him by the dying Virginia. It was a true effort to get well, though doomed to frustration, as were all his subsequent similar efforts with normal women, for his fixation to his dying and dead mother was too strong to permit him ever to gratify his urges towards healthy women. His flight to the wedded Mary, his sudden appearance and drunken, wildly excited condition, were clearly but little calculated to help him recapture her affections. Yet, it was just such vain and useless gestures which an inner necessity forced him to make. For though, on the one hand, he was compelled to fly from the dire temptations aroused in him by dead or dying women, on the other, the gruesome fidelity that chained him to the dead woman denied him a right to the living woman. If he turned to them, his way was blocked by the tomb of *Ulalume* while, if he stayed with his dying Virginia, his moral scruples forbade the fearful deeds prompted by his sado-necrophilist sex-urges. Thus both roads were blocked. Then, according as danger threatened most, he would dash for escape in the opposite direction until he found his way blocked and was forced to turn back. Only chastity remained allowed and the means by which to maintain it intact; drinking abroad with his cronies or opium, taken in secret, at home.

That Summer of 1842, the little household, pinched for money, moved to a humbler home in *Spring Garden Street*. There, their furniture, acquired so painfully, disappeared by degrees into the pawnshop, or was sold. The few friends who called found Virginia, coughing and pale, under the large pear tree in the garden or, less well, in her small upstairs room adjoining her mother's. Poe's room was below and, says Miss Herring, there he was kept locked in for days, whenever he over-indulged in opium, doubtless taken to render his home endurable after a "fugue".¹

Nevertheless, these "fugues", in one form or another, went on repeating themselves.

Poe's stay at Saratoga Springs that August came into the same category, though Dr. Mitchell had advised the visit for his health. Since Poe lacked the money to stay at this fashionable resort, a Philadelphia lady, at his doctor's suggestion, invited him there as her guest.

¹ Cf. pages 84-5.

This visit, however, gave rise to a burst of scandal, for the lady was married and socially prominent, and the young and brilliant writer with whom she daily went driving seemed altogether too attentive to her. Tongues began to wag and Poe returned home in haste.

During his absence, Virginia, it appears, had had another hæmorrhage, while he, on his return, had another heart attack. Misfortune lay heavy on the house and if Eddy at this time went out less, it was doubtless because opium and his weak heart kept him to his room.

But another "fugue" was soon to follow.

For some time Poe had again been pondering his cherished plans for his own magazine, which he now intended to call *The Stylus* in place of *The Penn*. The new name, he hoped, would rejuvenate the old scheme.

Meanwhile Thomas, that trusted friend, who now held a government post in Washington, had written to say that he hoped to interest the President's son, Robert Tyler, in Poe's scheme. Tyler, thought the friends, might also help Poe to a government post and thus, at last, make him financially secure. To this end, Thomas let Tyler know, since the latter dabbled in verse, that Poe, the formidable critic, had praised one of his poems. Thus, in March, Robert Tyler recommended Poe for a post in the Philadelphia Customs House.

They had reckoned, however, without the power of petty officials, often greater than that of patronage from on high, for Mr. Smith, Collector of Customs at the Port of Philadelphia, first put Poe off a number of times, then gave him a point-blank refusal.

Hopes for the *Stylus*, however, continued to run high and, pending its appearance, Poe began to contribute to *The Pioneer*, a Boston magazine lately started by James Russell Lowell.

Thus ended 1842. No *Stylus* made its appearance on January 1st, as Poe hoped. Later that month, however, it seemed near fruition, Poe having found the needful support in Thomas C. Clarke, a well-to-do publisher, to whom his friend Thomas had been of service. At last, Poe could feel himself within reach of security. In short, Clarke put his faith in Poe and on January 31st, 1843, even signed a contract with Poe and the engraver Darley, whereby the latter would provide such illustrations as were required. Hirst, still a great friend, wrote a colourful sketch of Poe's life for the *Philadelphia Saturday Museum*, an obscure periodical for which Poe, also, sometimes wrote. At the same time it was announced that the *Stylus* would soon appear. Thomas now seized the occasion of this publicity and Poe's fame as author and cryptographer to arrange for the latter to visit Washington. Poe was to lecture and attend on the Tylers

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at the White House: he was also to collect subscriptions to the *Stylus* from prominent citizens and government officials. It was also hoped to advance his appointment to a government post.

Never had the *Stylus* been so near realisation. True, Poe had not the money for the trip but that was advanced by Clarke. Thus, on March 8th, 1843, he set out for Washington with a heart beating high—too high—with joy, anticipation and manic excitement.

Thomas was a bachelor and lived at Fuller's Hotel, and there he had arranged for Poe to stay. As ill luck would have it Thomas was ill when Poe arrived and so he was confided to a friend named Dow.

Dow fully merited his nickname of "Rowdy Dow", and Mr. Fuller, the hotel proprietor, had a cellar of great renown. That evening, then, Poe, Dow, and some friends, paid due homage to Fuller's port. As a result Poe was ill next morning and without the wherewithal to pay for a shave before he appeared at the White House. On the 11th we find him writing to Clarke for more money, his expenses, he said, having been more than he thought. Subscriptions were coming in well and his lecture was arranged for the 13th; meanwhile he believed he was making a *sensation* in Washington.

This, indeed, was true, though hardly of a nature to enhance the reputation of the man characterised by the *Saturday Museum* as "one of the most powerful, chaste, and erudite writers of the day". Meanwhile, Dow had escorted Poe to the White House where Robert Tyler, perceiving his condition, thought it best to cancel his reception by the President. To cap all, Poe, all through his stay, insisted on wearing his cloak inside out and draped about him in Spanish fashion. Given his condition, there could be no question of allowing his lecture to take place. Dow then wrote to Clarke begging him to fetch Poe, he being in no state to travel alone.

As Clarke, however, failed to appear, Dow and Thomas were obliged to lend Poe some money and, after a final spree with Dow and others, including a Spaniard whose huge moustaches vastly incensed the irascible Virginian, Dow, on the evening of March 13th, despatched Poe to Philadelphia. Mrs. Clemm, duly informed, went to meet him.

Thus ended his Washington "fugue", since no other word so aptly describes the drunken spree into which he had managed to turn the business trip arranged for his benefit by his friend Thomas. This check to his hopes may well make the psycho-analyst ask what part in bringing it about was played by that need for self-punishment which dooms certain temperaments to repeated frustration and defeat. Was Edgar here bowing

to John Allan who had predicted that he would never succeed? Was he thus, by a sort of delayed obedience, submitting to the verdict the "father" had passed? Be that as it may, we know that Poe, in the ordinary sense, never really "succeeded" and that external circumstances were not entirely to blame.

This Washington trip is the clearest example of how Poe always managed to spoil any chance of success. Some will say that, as a dipsomaniac, he was hardly "responsible" for his acts and cannot therefore have desired a disaster which ruined his dearest hopes. Such a remark, however, would rest on the common tendency to confuse conscious and unconscious design. Poe was assuredly not "responsible" but, for that matter, who is? If he was not, his acts were all the more psychically determined and his unconscious, by urging him to the saloon instead of the White House, doubtless had its own objects. There is no such thing as chance to the psycho-analyst, even in the psyche's utmost depths.

Thus, Poe ruined any chance of success just when it seemed nearest. Clarke took alarm, soon entirely withdrew from any connection with the *Stylus*, and poverty again descended on the humble *Spring Garden Street* house.

Philadelphia began to seem impossible to him. He was considered a confirmed drunkard, his escapade at Washington was known and there were scandalous rumours about his connection with the Saratoga lady whom he may once more have visited in 1843. All this was to be woven into persecution ideas in his sick brain. He first broke with Hirst as being disloyal and then with his old Baltimore friend, Wilmer, for hatching dark plots.

Griswold, who often visited the little household, has left us this somewhat romantic picture of Poe at this time:

"He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayers. . . He would brave the wildest storms; and at night, with drenched garments and arms wildly beating the wind and rain he would speak as if to spirits" . . .¹

We may be sure that rain was not the only liquid that then moistened his lips.

Poe's destitution was complete. Their furniture was gone and they could no longer borrow from friends. Sis and Muddy had reverted to their dressmaking, but that brought in little. The prize of \$100, awarded by

¹ *Israfel*, p. 573.

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the *Dollar Newspaper* to *The Gold-Bug* was long spent, and *The Raven*, in its first version, had been refused by Peterson and Graham. Though Poe read it aloud to Graham's workers, assembled as a last court of appeal, they, too, upheld their employer's verdict. Poe was constrained to pocket his manuscript and pride and, like a beggar, accept the \$15 raised by a whip-round, then and there, on behalf of Virginia and Mrs. Clemm.

After some months of this wretched existence, placing an odd article here and there, Poe suddenly decided to quit Philadelphia. To return to Richmond was out of the question, Boston was impossible because of his attacks on the Northern writers, and Baltimore was too small for his ambitions. New York was the only place that remained, as a literary centre, in which he could try his fortune once more.

CHAPTER XVIII

New York

The Raven and Fame

EDGAR and Virginia, having left Muddy and Catterina in Philadelphia, reached New York on April 6th, 1844. After breakfast, next morning, in the *Greenwich Street* boarding-house where they had slept, Poe wrote to Mrs. Clemm describing their journey, (during which "Sissy coughed none at all") and expatiated on the abundant, excellent fare with the enthusiasm of one who did not always eat his fill. He also tells Muddy he soon hopes to send her the small sum needed to bring her to New York. The night before, Sis had "had a hearty cry" because she and Catterina were not there. He also hopes to borrow \$3, for he has only "\$4 and a half" left.¹

Poe then set about establishing contacts with newspapers and on Saturday, April 13th, the *New York Sun* published *The Balloon Hoax*, which purported to relate a balloon crossing of the Atlantic. Many readers were deceived by the story, greatly to Poe's delight. More concrete was the money he received for the story, which enabled Muddy to join her children in little over a week.

For the next few months the family subsisted wholly on random stories and articles placed wherever he could. The two rooms he had taken in *Greenwich Street* on the proceeds of *The Balloon Hoax*, were given up to Mrs. Clemm and Virginia soon after the former's arrival and he himself took a room elsewhere. There was a tavern nearby and here Poe is said to have read *The Raven*, as it then was, to the journalist and other frequenters. The story goes that Poe endlessly varied his versions according to the effect it produced on his listeners.

¹ Poe to Mrs. Clemm, April 7, 1844. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 165.)

Meanwhile his tales which, according to him, then numbered sixty-six,¹ still awaited a publisher. In vain did Professor Anthon who, in 1837, had translated some Hebrew texts for Poe's review of Stephen's *Arabia Petraea*, seek to placate Harpers on his behalf. Harpers continued to refuse to publish him because he had plagiarised their precious *Conchologist's First Book* for the benefit of another firm.

Thus, the summer of 1844 found Poe without regular employment or a publisher for his tales, and with the still unfinished *The Raven*.

Meanwhile, Virginia grew steadily worse and was greatly tried by the heat. For her sake, therefore, Poe took rooms for his family at a farmhouse in *Bloomingdale Road*, owned by the Brennans.

This farm stood on a knoll overlooking the Hudson Valley. There was a pond in front of the house and a bench under a large tree where Poe sat and dreamed until the Brennan children called him to meals. Upstairs were the bedrooms with Poe's study below and a bust of Pallas for its presiding genius. There, assailed by winds from every quarter and to the roar of autumnal gales, Poe at last hewed out *The Raven* in the form in which it was to wing through the world.

Mrs. Brennan tells us that her bills were always paid. But we also know that sometimes Poe lacked the money to claim his letters from the village post office.² His poverty remained extreme, although now rustic.

This period, generally, seems to have been one of sobriety, despite the nearby *Stryker's Bay Tavern*. There, he occasionally met some confrère—Thomas Dunn English or William R. Wallace—to whom he would read the latest version of *The Raven*. But he also recited the poem at home to Mrs. Brennan or Mrs. Clemm.

Muddy would listen, admire her Eddy and brew him coffee while he worked. Virginia pasted together the long rolls of paper which Eddy then covered with his fine script. But she was growing feebler and there were times when, such was her weakness, he had to carry her from her bedroom to meals.

We are indebted to the Brennan's daughter, Martha, for a glimpse of Poe's life at this time. She describes him as the most tender, attentive of husbands and never saw signs of that "wild, impetuous nature" with which he was credited. Nor, during two seasons, when she saw him daily, did she ever see him "affected by *liquour*" . . . He often wandered in the neighbouring woods and then, in the afternoon, would settle at the

¹ Poe to Anthon, June, 1844. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 179.)

² In those days the postage on letters was paid by the addressee.

window of the large downstairs room and work uninterruptedly until dusk.

Such is the idyllic picture she traces of their life. Yet other observers, given the moment and their bias, have left us wholly contradictory portraits. To some he was demonic, mad: to others angelically gentle. Each picture, in its way, must be true, for each reflects a phase in his cyclic condition where hypomania alternated with melancholia, interrupted by periods of comparative calm which grew ever shorter as he aged. This sojourn with the Brennans, on their small farm overlooking the Hudson, seems to have been the longest respite of comparative calm that Poe was thenceforth to know.

This idyllic interlude could not continue indefinitely and some form of livelihood had to be found. In September, therefore, Mrs. Clemm began to look about for something for him to do and early in October we find Poe employed on the *Evening Mirror*, no longer however as chief-editor, but now as "mechanical paragraphist", his simple function being to cull items from various sources and make small contributions of his own.

The owner of the *Mirror*, N. P. Willis, was a likeable person, popular in the salons of the New York "Literati" and a favourite with women. Born in 1806, he had started early as a poet, then began to write for the magazines and soon built up a reputation as journalist and critic. He had visited England twice and there become acquainted with a number of literary lights. Returning, he had concentrated all his energies on journalism.

Poe must certainly have found his subordinate position difficult, but none the less worked regularly from nine until evening. Willis has praised his employee as "a quiet, patient, industrious, and most gentlemanly person, commanding the utmost respect from his unvarying deportment and ability."¹

The *Mirror's* offices, however, were too distant for comfort and, in November, the family moved back to New York.² Virginia's health worsened and—given Poe's meagre wage—their poverty, too. Its extent is revealed by this anecdote.

Gabriel Harrison, a small shopkeeper on Broadway, relates how, one evening, a somewhat down-at-heel gentleman entered his shop and asked

¹ *Israfel*, p. 619.

² Poe's successive residence in New York in 1845: 15 *Amity Street*, 195 *Broadway*, 85 *Amity Street*.

the price of tobacco. On being told he turned sadly away. It was evident he had not the wherewithal to make a purchase. Moved to pity, Harrison "offered him a piece of tobacco"

Fortunately, towards the end of the year, James Russell Lowell visited New York to see his friend Briggs, then about to launch a new weekly entitled the *Broadway Journal*. Lowell recommended Poe, and Briggs promptly engaged him.

Poe had at last brought *The Raven* to perfection and was counting on it to make him famous at last. He therefore did everything possible to give it publicity. Thus, early in 1845, *The Raven*, prefaced by laudatory notices, made an almost simultaneous appearance in the *Evening Mirror*, the *American Whig Review*, the *Broadway Journal* and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The copy printed in the *American Whig Review* was signed "Quarles", the better to intrigue the public.

Poe was not disappointed. Almost overnight, he found himself famous and an object of universal curiosity. Soon *The Raven* even traversed the Atlantic, carrying its lover's lament for his lost Lenore. This was when he took on that romantic, "satanic" aspect which, for posterity, he was thenceforth to wear.

In the first flush of his glory, Poe, on February 28th, gave a much-applauded lecture to the "Literati" of New York. By now admirers were beginning to collect his manuscripts. More solid still, Briggs offered him a one-third interest in the *Broadway Journal*, Poe, it is said, having persuaded him that his name would add lustre to the obscurer names of Briggs and Bisco and so enhance the journal's popularity and increase its subscribers.

Poe joined the *Broadway Journal* during a period of calm and comparative sobriety, as we know from accounts by several witnesses. That of Briggs may be added to those already quoted: "I like Poe exceedingly well; Mr. Griswold has told me shocking bad stories about him which his whole demeanor contradicts". Thus did Briggs write to Lowell in January 1845, and prove how Poe was maligned by Griswold. The former had, in fact, met Griswold again in the offices of the *New York Tribune*, preparing his anthology, *Prose Writers of America*, and the two men had become friendly. In our opinion, this was not only because Poe hoped to shine in Griswold's anthology but, above all, because of that strange emotional ambivalence which bound him to an enemy. Griswold, however, continued to malign him.

Alas! the poet was about to justify all Griswold said, for *The Raven's* success, the social connections it gained him and above all the adulation of

the women he now met, whether in the salons of the "literati" or at the theatre, (for he was also the *Journal's* dramatic critic), soon seem to have disturbed his balance.

In March he entered into a new period of hypomania and began to drink more heavily than ever. His excited air at this time struck all who met him. Yet despite his frantic activity in this condition—working, he said, up to fifteen hours a day¹—and his many contributions to the *Journal*, Briggs found much to object to in his new associate.

For Poe had made many enemies for the *Journal* with his "Longfellow War" and his controversy with Outis, conducted with almost maniacal violence, as well as by his skirmishes with the "Transcendentalists" and his attacks on the "plagiarists" whom, with the touchiness of the paranoiac, he discovered on all sides. Briggs, therefore, began to find Poe embarrassing and would have liked to oust him from the *Journal*, while Poe wished to be rid of Briggs. Since Poe, however, was irreplaceable and Bisco sided with him, Briggs, in financial difficulties, was first to go.

Meanwhile, glory had brought no wealth nor could it heal Virginia, who still spat blood and coughed up her lungs in their poor *Amity Street* lodgings. Her strength was now failing fast. For Edgar, however, away from his home, there was adulation if not riches, drink and women who, if less dear than his dying Virginia, did not, at least, expose him to such horrible temptations. Thus, during this Spring of 1845, Poe hurled himself into the first of those frenzied and platonic courtships to which, till his death, he was to succumb.

In his lecture Poe had showered praises on Frances Osgood's mawkish though elegant verses. He had also sent her *The Raven* and requested her "judgement" while, at the same time, asking that they might meet. Willis took him to her house and Mrs. Osgood thus describes their meeting:

"I shall never forget the morning when I was summoned to the drawing-room by Mr. Willis to receive him. With his proud, beautiful head erect, his dark eyes flashing with the electric light of feeling and of thought, a peculiar, an inimitable blending of sweetness and hauteur in his expression and manner, he greeted me, calmly, gravely, almost coldly, yet with so marked an earnestness that I could not help being greatly impressed by it. From that moment until his death we were friends, although we met only during the first year of our acquaintance."²

¹ *Poe to Thomas*, May 4, 1845. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 203.)

² *Israfel*, p. 643.



FRANCES SARGENT OSGOOD
(from an engraving)

Later, they began to exchange poems, Poe sending verses earlier addressed to Eliza White and others. No matter, this was true love at last! Meanwhile, Mrs. Osgood, caught between an expiring flirtation with Griswold and a budding attachment to Poe, sent her poems to each. This, Griswold never forgave his rival, not even in the grave.

Poe and Mrs. Osgood now met frequently, either at her home or his. Virginia showed no jealousy but rather encouraged the "friendship", as did Mrs. Clemm; they doubtless preferred it to the tavern. Nor could Mrs. Osgood's artist-husband have minded, for he later painted a portrait of Poe.

Here is Poe's description of the woman he loved:

"In character she is ardent, sensitive, impulsive,—the very soul of trust and honor: a worshipper of the beautiful with a heart so radically artless as to seem abundant in art: unusually admired, respected and beloved. In person she is about the medium height, slender even to fragility, graceful whether in action or repose: complexion usually pale, hair black and glossy: eyes a clear, luminous gray, large, and with singular capacity for expression."¹

Surely, this portrait reminds us of Elizabeth Arnold; the large "expressive" eyes, the black hair, the pale complexion and the slender fragility. As if to confirm this likeness, Mrs. Osgood, four years later, was to die of consumption and doubtless had borne marks of the disease when they met. She was four years older than Poe and was linked to him by another maternal attribute; her name, Frances.

There is some obscurity about their relation for few documents exist and their abundant correspondence was unfortunately destroyed. We do know, however, that this first of Poe's passions of his later years was as intense as it was "ethereal" and platonic.

The resultant scandal, the "great critic's" exaggerated praise of her mediocre poems, the known voluminousness of a correspondence, later to be destroyed as "compromising", and Mrs. Osgood's own reactions to Poe's assiduities, all testify to the intensity reached by his "mad" passion.

But Poe had now too many sexual temptations to cope with unaided, for on the one hand there was Virginia, now near death, and on the other Mrs. Osgood, only too living. Thus, it should not surprise us to find him, that Spring, haunting the taverns at least as earnestly as he haunted Mrs. Osgood. Though we lack the precise dates, it would seem that this

¹ *Israfel*, p. 644.

fresh attack of dipsomania must have coincided with the onset of his new passion. Thus, we have here a whole succession of "fugues": he fled to Mrs. Osgood from the temptations aroused by Virginia and then to his "boon companions" from Mrs. Osgood's charms.

When Lowell, therefore, after his honeymoon, stopped in New York to visit Poe and see the friend he had never met, it was to be greatly disillusioned, for he found him "not tipsy—but as if he had been holding his head under a pump to cool it". Poe was in a sarcastic and bitter mood and Mrs. Clemm, years later, still sought excuses for her Eddy in writing to Lowell: "The day you saw him in New York he was not himself".

We have other evidence as to Poe's frequent condition at this time. Saunders, librarian of the Astor Library, one day met him "effusive and maudlin"—i.e., drunk, on Broadway, and was told that Poe was going to recite *The Raven* to Queen Victoria and the royal family. On another occasion Poe told Saunders that American authors were conspiring to belittle his genius and prevent his work being known. When Poe was drinking (as frequently happened) he would talk, so Saunders says, only of himself, his work and the jealousy of other writers. Thus, with his growing mental derangement, his delusions of persecution and grandeur increased.

Early in July, Dr. Chivers, a friend and correspondent who was visiting New York, met Poe drunk in the street. While he was taking him home they happened to encounter Gaylord Clark, editor of the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. Poe thereupon began to abuse Clark for various imaginary injuries and Clark, seeing how things stood, escaped quickly. The full significance of this scene, however, is best appreciated when we remember that, in 1843, another Clarke was to have financed the *Stylus* but withdrew, naturally enough, after Poe's débâcle in Washington. And it was just when Poe was again canvassing Chivers' aid, to help him start his eternal *Stylus*, that they were met by another Clark, the editor of a flourishing review. This was sufficient, indeed, to arouse Poe's ire in his then condition and make him transfer to this Clark his grievances against that Clarke who had failed him before, as well as his grievance against Chivers whom he felt would now fail him too. Thus will the unconscious utilise verbal resemblances to establish the deepest psychic relations between things.

The *Stylus* continued a dream, but the *Broadway Journal* was to fall into Poe's hands. It came about thus. Briggs had hoped that he would be able to buy out his partners after the completion of the first half-yearly issues. But Bisco, in concert with Poe, held out for more than Briggs could

raise. Briggs, needing money, was thus forced to cede the *Journal* to his partners. Later, thanks to \$40 borrowed from Horace Greeley, Poe was able to buy Bisco out and thus become not only sole editor, but sole proprietor of the *Journal*.

His great dream seemed near fruition, for now he had a magazine of his own, not, true, his sole creation, as the *Stylus* would have been, but nevertheless one he could fashion as he would, once it was free from debt. Such was his mental condition, however, that no one would give him credit and the latter half of 1845 saw the rapid decline of the *Broadway Journal* and, with it, of his hopes.

Contemporary accounts, as that of R. H. Stoddard, reveal all Poe's instability at this time. The former, then a very young man, greatly influenced by Keats, had written a poem entitled *The Grecian Flute*. This he took to Poe who received him cordially and said he would publish the poem. A little later the following notice appeared in the *Journal*: "To the author of the *Grecian Flute*: We fear that we have mislaid the poem." A month later, this notice was inserted: "We doubt the originality of the *Grecian Flute*, for the reason it is too good at some points to be so bad at others. Unless the author can reassure us, we decline it . . ." Stoddard then returned to Poe's office on a hot summer afternoon and found the poet, having lunched, asleep in an armchair. Stoddard, who had intended to speak in his own justification, met with a most ungracious reception: he was shown the door and even threatened with violence.

Yet, another day that summer we find Poe, with motherly care, bathing his office boy's wrists and brow, the heat having proved too much for him. This touching reminiscence of his loved "boss" is recorded by the same office boy, Alec Crane.

Meanwhile, Poe's infatuation for Mrs. Osgood continued. She relates how, one morning, visiting Poe at home, she found him writing his articles on the New York "Literati". "See", he said with a triumphant laugh, as he displayed a number of small rolls of narrow paper, which he always used for articles, 'I am going to show you by the difference of length in these, the different degrees of estimation in which I hold all you literary people. In each of these one of you is rolled up and fully discussed. Come, Virginia, help me!' Successively they unrolled the scrolls until one was reached that seemed quite interminable. Virginia then laughingly ran to a corner of the room holding one end, while Poe ran to the opposite corner holding the other. 'And whose lengthened sweetness long drawn out is that?' said I. 'Hear, hear!' he cried. 'Just as if her little vain heart

didn't tell her it's herself' ”¹ Such, indeed, measured by yards, was the place then held in Poe's heart by Mrs. Osgood.

But, as always when in love, Poe soon found means to lose the object of his affections. Withal, since the liaison gave rise to increasing scandal, the lady's relatives soon grew restive. Mrs. Osgood, therefore, fled from New York to Albany that summer. Though other reasons were given for her departure, she herself wrote, “I went to Albany, and afterwards to Boston and Providence, to avoid him”.

Poe followed her to Albany. She then fled to Boston, where he again sought her out, and then again to Providence, where they spent at least one evening together.

Mrs. Helen Whitman, a poetess of the “transcendental” school, then lived in Providence. Though he had not met her, Poe, from her work, imagined he had recognised a “spiritual sister”. Mrs. Whitman was well off and a widow, and was said to be beautiful. Now Mrs. Osgood, doubtless alarmed by Poe's insensate behaviour and hoping, perhaps, to turn his immoderate ardour elsewhere, offered to present him to this lady.

Poe refused, but that evening as he sauntered through the streets, he managed to pass her house and saw her in the moonlight, taking the air at her door. This vision made a deep impression, as we shall see from its repercussions. Later, in a well-known poem, Mrs. Whitman's doorstep was metamorphosed into a “garden of roses”.

For a time, however, Mrs. Osgood's supremacy was to remain undisputed.

This period of intense excitement was followed by one of great depression. “For the first time during two months,” Poe wrote from New York to Duyckinck on November 13th, “I find myself entirely myself—dreadfully sick and depressed, but still myself. I seem to have just awakened from some horrible dream, in which all was confusion and suffering . . . I really believe that I have been mad—but indeed I have had abundant reason to be so.”² After which, Poe begs Duyckinck to help rescue the *Broadway Journal*, then threatening to founder for lack of funds.

But Poe was no longer equal to dealing with the simplest matter. An invitation to lecture to the *Boston Lyceum* and read an unpublished poem found him entirely without inspiration. Unable to produce the new poem,

¹ *Israfel*, p. 657.

² *Poe to Duyckinck*, November 13th, 1845. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 221).

he contented himself with reading *Al Aaraaf* and then, the eternal *Raven*. Being later violently abused for thus ridiculing his audience, he claimed in his defence that a poem composed, printed and published "before we had fairly completed our tenth year" was good enough for Bostonians!

On January 3rd, 1846, the last number of the *Broadway Journal* appeared with the following notice:

"VALEDICTORY"

Unexpected engagements demanding my whole attention, and the objects being fulfilled so far as regards myself personally, for which 'The *Broadway Journal*' was established, I now, as its editor, bid farewell—as cordially to foes as to friends."¹

The *Broadway Journal* thus passed out of Poe's hands owing to his inability to raise \$140. Failure, born of himself, stuck ever closer to his heels.

Though the *Broadway Journal*, before its demise, had published many of Poe's earlier essays and tales, burnishing them with his new fame, and though twelve of the *Tales*² chosen by Duyckinck were re-issued in a single volume and for the first time brought him some money (8 cents per copy sold), and though a new edition of his poems appeared on New Year's Eve, launched on *The Raven's* wings,³ all this did little to relieve his circumstances and 1846 opened for him in the same dire distress.

While, as a literary lion, Poe now frequented literary salons, Virginia, in their ill-heated home, was coughing away her lungs. Leaving aside his need to flee from his dying wife's vicinity and his attraction to Mrs. Osgood, once more in New York, the lionising Poe now experienced must greatly have soothed his pride and comforted him for so many years of isolation and neglect. True, the "aristocracy" of New York, the "400", ignored him, but the salons of the "Literati" were far more alive, despite some pose and affectation. There, too, be vies of women, the "starry sisterhood" of poetesses, would listen ecstatically while he delivered those "eloquent monologues, half dream, half poetry" which antagonised the men but brought the women to his feet. There, with lights turned low, in his romantic voice, he would often recite *The Raven*.

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 240.

² *Tales*, by Edgar A. Poe: New York, Wiley & Putnam, 1845.

³ *The Raven and Other Poems*, by Edgar A. Poe: New York, Wiley & Putnam, 1845 (December 31st).

The great currents of opinion which were already agitating America, the abolition movement and the campaign for women's rights, meant little to Poe, whereas he was exasperated by American belief in "progress", the ruling principle of an age in which steam and machinery were beginning to transform the world. Alone of the movements then current, the spiritualists' faith in an unseen world found him indulgent. To Mesmerism he was indebted for the inspiration of *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, a tale which gratified his predilection for gruesome horror. And indeed, Poe's true domain was always to be that of his death-haunted dreams.

What passed between Poe and the "starry sisterhood", one of the sisterhood relates:

"The first time I ever saw Mr. Poe, he called upon me with his pretty child-wife, who must have been to him as near as anything earthy could be, 'Lenore', with her long, lustrous eyes, and serious lovely face. I had been inclined to some prejudice against him, from some gossip" (evidently about Mrs. Osgood) "that had come to my ears, but seeing him disarmed it all. I noted his delicate organization—the white, fine skin of a face that had upon it an expression of questioning like that of a child, a shade of anxiety, a touch of awe, of sadness; a look out of the large, clear eyes of intense solitude.

"I felt a painful sympathy for him, just as one would feel for a bright, over-thoughtful child. I said at once, 'Ah, Mr. Poe, this country affords no arena for those who live to dream.'

"'Do you dream? I mean sleeping dream?' he asked quickly.

"'Oh, yes, I am a perfect Joseph in dreaming, except that my dreams are of the unknown, the spiritual.'

"'I knew it', he said softly. 'I knew it by your eyes; and I—the great shadowy world of dreams, whose music hidden from mortal ears, swells through all space, and gleams of more than mortal beauty ravish the eyes, comes to me—that is to dream!' and his eyes were far off in expression as if he saw them upon the instant. Suddenly he asked:

"'Do those sweet shadowy faces wear to you an expression of pain?'

"'Not so much of pain as grave thoughtfulness—a tender sympathy.'

"'Ah, that is *your* mind—to me they wear a look of suffering—almost an appeal—and I spread out my hands to reach them. I call to them in my dreams, I am more to them than they to me. I call to them to speak, but they are silent, and float away, pointing onward.'"¹

¹ *Diary of Elizabeth Oakes Smith*, Lewiston Journal Co., Lewiston, Maine, p. 116. (*Israfel*, pp. 655-656.)

And such, indeed was Poe's world, the "shadowy world of dreams" of his spirit, into which the outer world could never pierce. There, deep in her son's heart, the consumptive Elizabeth Arnold reigned supreme, an anguished patient phantom, forever dying and forever "alive in death".

Mrs. Smith was right: Virginia, for Poe, as much as any earthly creature could be, was that Lenore who re-embodied his earliest and best-beloved first mother. Virginia, therefore, had no need to talk or be clever to please him. It was enough for him to watch her slowly dying.

The last time Virginia appeared in public was at one of Mrs. Smith's "at homes", which took place on alternate Sunday evenings. The invalid rarely went out and now, in a red dress, trimmed with yellow home-made lace, a dress made by herself and her mother, she sat silent by the fire, pale as ever and smiling gently as yet again she listened to Edgar reciting *The Raven*.

Mrs. Clemm never went to receptions. Whichever of his "starry sisterhood" Poe was visiting, Muddy would remain at home, sewing or at her housework. To her the "starry sisterhood" mainly represented a means to small loans whenever their position grew precarious.

These small requests were always granted, much to Poe's embarrassment, his only resource, in his inability to repay, being to praise their works with his "incorruptible" pen. Meanwhile, he found their visits too frequent for his taste, drawn as they were by the curiosity which now surrounded the author of *The Raven*, by the tragedy that brooded over his home, and by his scandalous passion for one of themselves.

Life in town being prejudicial to Virginia's health, Poe, with his family, in early Spring, once more moved to the Brennans. Soon, they moved to *Turtle Bay* and finally, late in May, to *Fordham* and the rustic cottage, wreathed in roses and honeysuckle and shaded by a large cherry-tree, where death was to come to Virginia at last.

CHAPTER XIX

Fordham: Virginia's Last Summer

Annabel Lee

NEW YORK being at some distance, Poe could not always return for the night, as we see from his one letter to Virginia which we find handed down.

"June 12, 1846.

"My dear Heart—My dear Virginia—Our mother will explain to you why I stay away from you this night. I trust the interview I am promised will result in some *substantial good* for me—for your dear sake and hers—keep up your heart in all hopefulness, and trust yet a little longer. On my last great disappointment I should have lost my courage *but for you*—my little darling wife. You are my *greatest* and *only* stimulus now, to battle with this uncongenial, unsatisfactory, and ungrateful life.

"I shall be with you tomorrow . . . P.M., and be assured until I see you I will keep in *loving remembrance* your *last words*, and your fervent prayer!

"Sleep well, and may God grant you a peaceful summer with your devoted Edgar."¹

It has been said the Poe wrote this letter immediately before going to meet Mrs. Osgood, but Hervey Allen thinks differently and opines that his "substantial good" must refer to business prospects.² It may be so, but we learn from Rosalie Poe, then visiting Fordham, that Mrs. Clemm next day was obliged to send Poe money and that he returned in a lamentable state, evidently having been drinking. Mrs. Clemm scolded him and put him to bed, whereupon he raved all night and kept on demanding morphine.

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Poe. (Virginia Edition, Vol. 17, p. 232.)*

² *Israfel*, pp. 699-700.



POE'S COTTAGE AT FORDHAM
(from a photograph)

Fordham: Virginia's Last Summer

At this time, overwhelmed with grief for his dying Virginia and, again, plagued by the repressed sado-necrophilist drives she aroused, temptations to flight must have dogged him more fiercely than ever. Thus he would flee to Mrs. Osgood or the tavern. Possibly, that evening, he had done both. But it was the tavern and his drinking cronies that represented the securest refuge from the dying, as from the living, woman.

Abroad, Poe sought oblivion in the bottle but, at home, he turned to morphine to secure him from Virginia's dire proximity.

From Rosalie, too, we learn that, fortunately, the despairing Edgar, at times, resorted to his third drug, ink. She recalls, in fact, that during this stay he read them an early version of *Annabel Lee*.

ANNABEL LEE¹

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of ANNABEL LEE—
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my ANNABEL LEE—
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

¹ ANNABEL LEE: *New York Tribune*, October 9, 1849; *Southern Literary Messenger*, November, 1849; *Sartain's Union Magazine*, January, 1850. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 218.) I quote the text of 1849 given in *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, pp. 117-118 (*New York Tribune*).

Poe's Life and Poems

The angels, not half so happy in heaven,
Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my ANNABEL LEE.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in heaven above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE:
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In the sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

What we do not know, however, is how far the poem which Rosalie heard in 1846 differs from the version here printed and which was only published after Poe's death in 1849. In that year Poe showed the poem to Mrs. S. A. Weiss, saying he had composed it long before the death of his wife.¹

Poe, in this talk with Mrs. Weiss, seems to have sought to confirm, from the date of the poem's composition, that it bore no relation whatever to Virginia but, like most of Poe's biographers, we do not hesitate to contradict him here. So emphatic a denial of so evident a fact would, of itself, suffice to rouse the analyst's distrust and make him suspect that so positive a rebuttal must conceal other and more important factors, stubbornly repressed and specially significant to Poe. For whether or no he denied it, or was even conscious of the fact, *Annabel Lee* was none the less directly inspired by Virginia. Nor was it necessary for her to be dead: it was sufficient that she was dying. The many other women who, later, claimed they inspired *Annabel Lee*, were deceiving themselves grossly. Virginia's

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 219.

Annabel Lee.
By Edgar A. Poe.

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee; —
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

She was a child and I was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love —
I and my Annabel Lee —
With a love that the winged seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud by night
Chilling my Annabel Lee;
So that her high-born kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

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impending death was the immediate factor which occasioned the poem, but its deeper and primary source, which Virginia's condition merely reactivated, lay far back in Poe's past.

The dual contributions, from the present and past, may be seen side by side in the poem:

I was a child and she was a child. Virginia, throughout her short life, remained a child by the side of her maturer husband. But he, in infancy, had dearly loved his beautiful ailing mother, *many and many a year ago* (thus he transcribes his distant infancy), *in a kingdom by the sea.* New York, to which he had come at six months and where he lived for a year, Norfolk where, after David Poe's flight, Rosalie came into the world while Edgar was still under two, and Charleston where, in 1810 and 1811, the poor sick actress lived for six months with her two smallest children,¹—that is, until Edgar was two and a half—were all so many cities of that great “kingdom by the sea” where, lulled by the boom of Atlantic breakers, the little boy had loved and been loved, with a first and final all-engrossing passion.

For it was there that Edgar had loved his mother with all the intensity of the child, an intensity long forgotten by the adult, so deeply has its memory been repressed, a love none the less real for all that. . . . “*we loved with a love that was more than love—I and my Annabel Lee*”.

The name *Annabel Lee* alone would deserve a chapter to itself. But Poe is no longer here to reveal the associations of ideas which would provide the key to our understanding of the strange names scattered through his works. Yet, we shall hazard a theory as regards *Annabel Lee*, for the name, in fact, reminds us of Elizabeth, both in the number of its syllables and its vague alliterations. True, the syllable *li* is transposed and becomes the final syllable as in the acrostics which, at times, delighted Poe and it might be said that Philip Pendleton Cooke's poem, *Rosalie Lee*, mentioned in Poe's letters² may, also, have influenced him. Yet, were that so, it was because the ground was already prepared to receive it, for the syllables *Rosalie Lee* would simultaneously evoke vague unconscious memories of his sister and mother, as well as of Virginia, who condensed both.

Perhaps a third event also determined his choice of the liquid, mellifluous title if, in fact, it was adopted after Poe met “Annie”, the Mrs.

¹ The reader will recall that William Henry Leonard was left at Baltimore in care of his grandparents.

² *Poe to Cooke*, August 9, 1846; and *Cooke to Poe*, August 4, 1846. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 268 and 264.)

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Richmond to whom we shall later revert.¹ In that case, Poe's condensation of the three names may be graphically represented thus:

Annie		belle		
E	sa	beth	Li	(Elizabeth acrostically arranged)
	sa		lie	(two syllables of Rosalie)
<hr/>				
Anna		bel	Lee	
(n from Annie, + a from Elizabeth)				(the i of Elizabeth has moved to the end, expelled from the second syllable by the a of Anna and attracted to the l of belle through analogy with Rosalie)

The reader unfamiliar with the way word-associations are used by the unconscious will, perhaps, find this somewhat far-fetched, but if we remember the important part played by word-associations in dreams, delirium and infantile thinking, we shall better appreciate its validity.

The whole poem, moreover, vibrates with echoes from Poe's distant past, for it was because the winged seraphs of heaven were jealous of the child's love that *long ago . . . a wind blew out of a cloud, chilling/My beautiful ANNABEL LEE;/So that her highborn kinsmen came/And bore her away from me,/To shut her up in a sepulchre/In this kingdom by the sea.* Is not this what, in fact, happened? And we even here find the then popular superstition that consumption could be caught from a chill, while in "*her highborn kinsmen came*", we hear the echo of the coffin bearers who bore Elizabeth Arnold's corpse to the tomb. But we must pause for a moment to consider these "highborn kinsmen".

In *The Sleeper*, an earlier poem, we also find a heroine of noble lineage whose "grand family funerals" were solemnized by "crested palls". This phantasy, as we saw, was the natural reaction of wounded pride in a youth whose parents were strolling players, who was a charity ward and never allowed to forget it, and who prided himself on a grandfather renowned as

¹ Poe's memories of his Aunt Nancy, Miss *Anne* Valentine, should also be taken into account, as possibly leading to the adoption of the name *Annabel Lee* even before Poe met Annie Richmond.

one of the heroes of the War of Independence. But Annabel Lee's "high-born kinsmen"¹ conveys still more regarding their identity, for they seem to be one individual represented by a royal "we"; thus, in fact, the awe-inspiring father, he who, in the Œdipus situation, disputes the child's possession of his mother and takes her from him.

Yet that father, whose awe-inspiring form we here find unconsciously reduplicated to become not only the *highborn kinsmen*, but *the angels in heaven above* and *the demons down under the sea*, that father, despite his majesty, projected through infinite space, is none the less impotent to dis sever the child's soul *from the soul Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE*. For, *our love it was stronger by far than the love/Of those who were older than we—/Of many far wiser than we*. Thus does the child, in the arrogance of his vast love for the cherished mother, prevail over the father, that father who, in Edgar's case, was ejected when the child was but eighteen months old. At that tender age and, for about six months, Poe was the sole, undisputed possessor of his mother (his elder brother was already supplanted and with the grandparents at Baltimore) *i.e.*, until Rosalie was born—an infantile triumph which profoundly affected his life.

May it have been, however, that another than David Poe was Rosalie's father? John Allan held it so and it was gossipped. Doubtless, the truth lay in the mysterious packet of letters bequeathed by Elizabeth Arnold to her children which, after Poe's death, was burnt by Mrs. Clemm in accordance with his wishes. For though Hervey Allen champions Elizabeth Arnold's virtue, he does not say on what grounds.² I shall be less didactic, for the possibility that a second man may have played a father's part in Edgar's childhood seems worth considering to me.

Given the publicity that surrounds an actress's life it seems, however, unlikely that that second man, if he existed, would have shared Elizabeth's life after David Poe left her. Had that been so, surely some intimation would have reached us. We may take it, therefore, that David Poe's place remained unfilled from July 1810, and that for some months

¹ "Highborn kinsmen" occurs in the plural in the *New York Tribune* version of October 9th, 1849, in the *Southern Literary Messenger* of November, 1849, and in the Griswold manuscript written in Poe's hand. *Sartain's Union Magazine* for January, 1850, has "highborn kinsman". Sartain accompanied this latter publication of the poem with a note that this version had been given him by Poe himself. It contained several variants on the *New York Tribune* text.

The variant "kinsman", if authentic—as we have every reason to believe—can only support our interpretation.

² *Israfel*, pp. 14–15.

—until Rosalie's birth—the little boy would enjoy the triumph of being and sleeping, undisturbed, with his mother: *And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side/Of my darling . . .* But love too undisturbed has its dangers for the child, whose impressionable psyche will always retain its first erotic experiences as a nucleus for future unconscious "fixations". This was the time when his fulfilled desires assumed and retained those "Poesque" characteristics which he derived directly from his mother; her slowness and beauty; her illness and consumption; her pallor and wasting; her blood-spittings and finally her cold, white, dead body. Poe's necrophilia, doubtless like other necrophilias the psycho-analytic study of which remains to be made, that necrophilia which Poe sublimated in art, is the supreme expression of unswerving devotion to an infantile love-object. For that reason *the moon* (a mother symbol) *never beams, without bringing me dreams/Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE; And the stars never rise, but I see the bright eyes/Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE.* These eyes, the eyes which he saw in his dreams, the eyes which were to inspire *Ligeia*,¹ are those which, in the miniature of Elizabeth Arnold, turn their strange wide gaze upon us and were to make their adorer, Edgar, almost a fetishist of eyes.

A true necrophilist phantasy concludes the poem: *And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side/Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,/In her sepulchre there by the sea—/In her tomb by the sounding sea.*

We thus see how passionately the little three-year boy would yearn to follow the mother "they" were bearing away in her strange, heavy sleep, and to sleep, as she slept, at her side. So later, at Virginia's bed, re-experiencing the dim past, he would be filled by old funereal feelings, by virtue of the repetition compulsion which governs our lives. Annabel Lee, like Virginia, dies virgin, as in the child's unconscious phantasies of the mother, in order that none may dispute his possession of her. Meanwhile, throughout the poem, we hear the murmur of the "sounding sea", the sea so intimately wedded with Poe's infancy, the sea which, in all ages and to all men, is the universal, phylogenetic "mother" symbol.

¹ Lauvrière, following Ingram, writes in his *Edgar Poe, sa vie et son œuvre*, (1904, p. 527, note 3): "An annotation in Poe's own hand, in a copy belonging to Ingram, states that *Ligeia* was suggested to him by a dream in which a woman's eyes inspired him with the intense emotions which he has described in the fourth paragraph of the tale."

The passage from Ingram alluded to by Lauvrière occurs in John H. Ingram, *Edgar Allan Poe, His Life, Letters and Opinions*: London, W. H. Allen & Co., 1886, new edition, p. 126.

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My personal opinion is that Poe, beside his dying Virginia, would frequently have taken opium to help him endure the present and escape to his paradise of the past, for though life at *Fordham* only too well reproduced his infantile circumstances, it could not give him the ecstasies of the past.

Opium, by the voluptuous immobility it imposes, doubtless encouraged his necrophilist phantasies and enabled him to imagine himself "by the side" of the loved corpse of one or other of his Annabel Lees.

An interesting comparison might be drawn between *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven*. In each, the hero is a lover bereaved, but the triumphant note of *Annabel Lee* is wholly absent from *The Raven*. Fate has robbed him of his Lenore and the raven incessantly tells him he will find her "nevermore". It is, perhaps, the most hopeless and despairing of Poe's poems.

But who, then, is this Raven? For a long time I was at a loss and it was only when analysing *Annabel Lee* that I realised its identity with the "highborn kinsmen" who separate the poet from his Annabel Lee. Like them, the Raven is a father figure, an Œdipus father-symbol placed between mother and child. Like Science, which in an earlier poem personified John Allan, the Raven is old and from its perch on the bust of Pallas, goddess of reason and "science", it casts that shadow on the poet that "shall be lifted—Nevermore".

The poem ends on this note of hopeless despair, with the final defeat of the son, a defeat the poet's life reflected, for Poe's soul was never to cast off the Raven's shadow, the shadow of the memory of Lenore. Nevertheless, the theme of *Annabel Lee* is similar, though transposed into a major key, a key of triumph and exultation. Whereas the lover of Lenore bewails one reft from him by death, he who loved *Annabel Lee* denies that grief, and proclaims his eternal attachment to the dead one. No highborn kinsmen, angels or demons, can ever dis sever the poet from the soul of his Annabel Lee—nor her body, either, for "*all the night-tide, I lie down by the side/Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,/In the sepulchre there by the sea—/In her tomb by the sounding sea*".

In a sense, therefore, *Annabel Lee* represents a reaction to the despair expressed in *The Raven* in that, in the former, Poe triumphs over fate and refuses to recognise the reality of his loss. In analytic terms, the poem represents the triumph of the "pleasure principle".

For *Annabel Lee*, more directly than *The Raven*, issues from the unconscious, where the pleasure principle dwells. And though we do not

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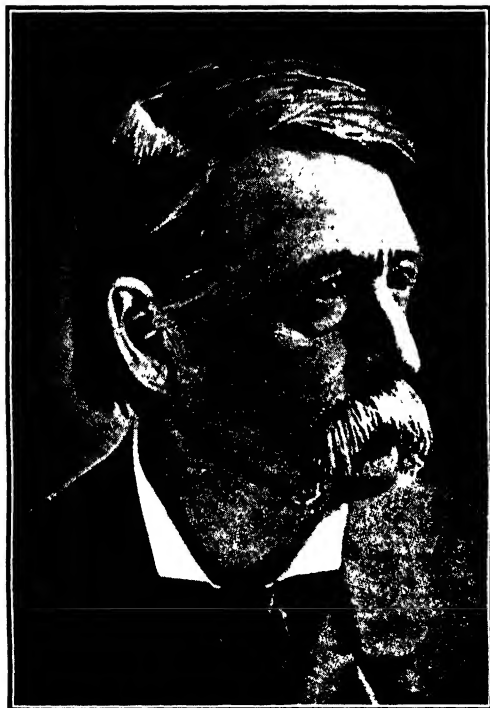
unreservedly accept Poe's claim, in *The Philosophy of Composition*, that each idea, word, "effect" and rhythm in *The Raven* were all deliberately selected, even to the lost-love motif—which obviously was "imposed" on him, as all his work shows—we must still admit that *The Raven*, of all his poems, most reeks of the lamp. It is more mechanical and stagey than *Annabel Lee*, *Ulalume* or *For Annie*, Poe's three last great poems, and so moves us far less.

Poe worked little at *Fordham*. "For more than six months", he wrote to Chivers on December 15th, 1846,

"I have been ill—for the greater part of that time, dangerously so and quite unable to write even an ordinary letter. My magazine papers appearing in this interval were all in the publisher's hand before I was taken sick. Since getting better, I have been, as a matter of course, overwhelmed with the business accumulating during my illness".¹

The articles thus referred to were the series of critical studies on New York writers entitled *The Literati* which, in June 1846, began to appear in *Godey's Lady's Book*. These papers were intended to form part of a volume on which he had been working for months but had not managed to finish, a volume he intended to call, depending on his mood, either *The American Parnassus* or *Literary America*. More hastily written and more superficial than his earlier criticism, his *The Literati* of 1846 was more indulgent, more flattering to the women than ever, but also more abusive of, and aggressive towards, certain of the men. In spite of their great talent and fluency, these essays testify to his mental disturbance at this time for, alongside just appreciations of his authors, thanks to his sure æsthetic taste, and his prickings of bubble reputations which posterity has confirmed, we find torrents of invective inspired by personal grievances or increasing delusions of persecution. Briggs, the founder of the then dead *Broadway Journal*, is termed "brandy-nosed Mr. Briggs!", Clark, owner of the all too-alive *Knickerbocker*, whom he had once threatened and abused in a New York street, was thoroughly trounced and termed little better than a pumpkin. Even Thomas Dunn English, his once close friend, whom he had known in Philadelphia, and in whose New York flat Poe had found a last refuge for the expiring *Broadway Journal*, was torn to shreds as "Thomas Done Brown", ridiculed for his moustache, and dubbed

¹ *Poe to* — (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 269.) According to Hervey Allen (*Israfel*, p. 721) this letter was addressed to Chivers.



THOMAS DUNN ENGLISH
(from a photograph)

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ignoramus, ass and wind-bag:¹ all this with some pretension to wit, a talent, nevertheless, which Poe lacked. Such was the tone to which Poe could lower himself as a result of his increasing paranoia.

True, Lane informs us—he having shared rooms with English during the *Broadway Journal's* last days—that English took pleasure in annoying Poe, probably by mocking him when drunk. Poe who was always touchy, must have been more so then, and one such evening the two men came to blows. English was also a fair target for abuse in other ways, for it appears he had once lamely taken a thrashing from Hirst and, in short, seems to have had little breeding. Poe, however, in descending to this kind of polemic, could only expose himself to similar ripostes.

Also, in this early part of Poe's life at Fordham, the epilogue to his passion for Mrs. Osgood occurred.

The two "poets" had carried on an immense sentimental correspondence. It was Poe's habit to leave his letters about or, at least, do nothing to protect them from Mrs. Clemm's eyes. Muddy read them, therefore. This, of itself, would hardly have mattered had it not been that, remote as it was, the "starry sisterhood" still visited *Fordham*, among whom Mrs. Lewis, who rejoiced in the name of "Estelle", Mrs. Oakes Smith and Mrs. Mary Gove Nichols. Then, one day in June, Mrs. Ellet appeared, the sisterhood's greatest prude and gossip.

Mrs. Clemm enjoyed these visits which broke the monotony of her lonely life and Mrs. Ellet, doubtless, found it easy to draw her out. Muddy who, for all her goodness, was at times unthinking and tactless, was then imprudent enough to read out certain of Mrs. Osgood's letters.

Great was the indignation in the "starry sisterhood's" ranks when this episode was promptly reported. What! Was one of the band's honour to be flouted? Mrs. Osgood took fright. It is said that, already fearful of scandal, she no longer saw Poe. In any case, she now ended the acquaintance. Thereupon, Mrs. Osgood despatched some delegates from the "sisterhood", under Mrs. Ellet, to reclaim her letters.

Poe, as may be imagined, received them in no affable humour. He at once gave up the letters, but remarked that Mrs. Ellet might also have concerned herself for those of her own he possessed.

The ladies having left, Poe began to regret his ill-bred innuendo and thereupon took Mrs. Ellet's letters to New York and left them at her door. The splenetic Mrs. Ellet, however, denied their receipt, and her

¹ Poe used the German *Windbeutel*, a literal equivalent.

brother, Mr. Lummis, soon wrathfully appeared, accused Poe of slandering his sister and demanded that the letters be returned. He refused to accept Poe's assurance that the letters had been returned already and went about New York saying he would kill Poe or make him fight a duel.

Poe now did something astonishing: he went and sought out Thomas Dunn English, the very man he had abused and ridiculed as "Thomas Done Brown", a man to whom he owed money and with whom, in January, when drunk, he had come to blows, to ask him to act as his second in a matter concerning his honour! Later, in much the same way, Poe was to appoint his worse enemy, Griswold, to be his literary executor.

English has left us his account of Poe's visit. Poe wished to be reconciled, offered his apologies and said he had a favour to ask. English accepted the apologies, but not the hand Poe offered. He refused to be Poe's second or lend him a pistol. The latter then abused him, whereupon English, so he says, gave him a sound cuffing and put him out.

This episode ended tamely in the "war of the Literati". Possibly, Mr. Lummis, in the interim, may have found his sister's letters. At any rate, Poe, now again ill, conveyed his apologies to Lummis from his sick bed, and had the letter carried by Dr. Francis, his physician, as best able to vouch for his state. Lummis expressed himself satisfied. English, however, was not so easily pacified and, on June 23rd, 1846, *Mr. English's Reply to Mr. Poe* appeared in the *New York Mirror*. In this raging diatribe Poe's last visit to him is described in detail, as also the manner in which he alleges he treated that "abject poltroon", Poe. Poe's drunkenness was thus made public. English also accused Poe of forgery, an accusation originally made by a New York merchant.

Poe's reply to English appeared on July 10th following, in the Philadelphia *Spirit of the Times*. The tone was equally violent. Poe admitted and deplored his propensity to drink, but indignantly rebutted the forgery charge, and quotes a letter from the same merchant, dated a year before, in which the libel is retracted. According to Poe, English was shown this letter at the time, but since he persisted in spreading the tale, Poe announced he would sue him for libel.

English's rejoinder appeared on July 13th in the *New York Mirror*. Poe then began his libel suit and received a verdict in his favour. English was mulcted in \$225 damages, plus interest and costs.

During this summer of 1846, Poe was again in "dreadful poverty", as he himself writes in a letter to Chivers, dated July 22nd. English's money was still to come, and his articles on the "Literati" had brought in little.

Also, he had almost stopped writing, and his claim to be able to direct

his creative faculty, made in *The Philosophy of Composition* the previous year, was less a statement of fact than a desperate effort to deny intimations of approaching "madness".

Poe, like all writers, wrote what his unconscious dictated. But, though much of his work depended on the "secondary elaboration" of conscious or preconscious mental operations (as we see from his constant striving for perfection), reason alone could not provide inspiration when that failed.

Mrs. Gove Nichols has left us a picture of his life at this time, doubtless after a visit to *Fordham* that summer. She writes:

"On this occasion I was introduced to the young wife of the poet, and to the mother. . . She was a tall, dignified old lady, with a most lady-like manner, and her black dress, though old and much worn, looked really elegant on her. She wore a widow's cap, of the genuine pattern, and it suited her exquisitely with her snow-white hair. Her features were large and corresponded with her stature, and it seemed strange how such a stalwart and queenly woman could be the mother of her *petite* daughter. Mrs. Poe looked very young; she had large black eyes, and a pearly whiteness of complexion which was a perfect pallor. Her pale face, her brilliant eyes, and her raven hair gave her an unearthly look. One felt that she was almost a disrobed spirit, and when she coughed, it was made certain that she was rapidly passing away.

"The mother seemed hale and strong, and appeared to be a sort of universal Providence to her strange children.

"The cottage had an air of gentility that must have been lent to it by the presence of its inmates. So neat, so poor, so unfurnished, and yet so charming a dwelling I never saw. The floor of the kitchen was white as wheaten flour. A table, a chair, and a little stove it contained, seemed to furnish it completely. The sitting-room was laid with check matting; four chairs, a light stand, and a hanging bookshelf completed its furniture. . . Poe was at this time greatly depressed. Their extreme poverty, the sickness of his wife, and his own inability to write sufficiently accounted for this. We spent half an hour in the house, when some more company came, which included ladies, and then we all went to walk. We strolled away into the woods, and had a very cheerful time till someone proposed a game of leaping. I think it must have been Poe, as he was an expert in the exercise. Two or three gentlemen agreed to leap with him, and though one of them was tall, and had been a hunter in times past, Poe still distanced them all. But alas! his gaiters, long worn and carefully kept, were both burst in the grand leap that made him victor. . . I was certain he had no other shoes, boots or gaiters. Who amongst us could offer him money to buy a new pair?

... When we reached the cottage I think we all felt we must not go in, to see the shoeless unfortunate sitting or standing in our midst. I had an errand, however—and I entered the house to get it. The poor old mother looked at his feet with a dismay that I shall never forget. 'Oh, Eddie!' said she, 'how did you burst your gaiters?' Poe seemed to have come into a semi-torpid state as soon as he saw his mother. 'Do answer Muddie,' now said she coaxingly—I related the cause of the mishap and she drew me into the kitchen.

"'Will you speak to Mr. —' she said, 'about Eddie's last poem?' Mr. — was the reviewer. 'If he will only take the poem, Eddie can have a pair of shoes. He has it—I carried it last week, and Eddie says it is his best. You will speak to him about it, won't you?'"

"We had already read the poem in conclave, and Heaven forgive us, we could not make head nor tail of it. It might as well have been in any of the lost languages, for any meaning we could extract from its melodious numbers. I remember saying that I believed it was only a hoax that Poe was passing off for poetry, to see how far his name would go in imposing on people. But here was a situation. The reviewer had been actively instrumental in the demolition of the gaiters.

"'Of course they will publish the poem', said I, 'and I will ask C. to be quick about it.'

"The poem was paid for at once, and published soon after. I presume it is regarded as genuine poetry in the collected poems of its author, but then it brought the poet a pair of gaiters, and twelve shillings over."¹

Which poem was this? Hervey Allen identifies it with one read at Miss Lynch's somewhere about this time, in which case the poem would be *Ulalume*.² This I am inclined to doubt. For, far from being "published soon after" this episode, *Ulalume* was not published until December 1847. This, naturally, does not settle the matter, for Mrs. Nichols may have erred, and there may have been some delay in publishing the poem. Though it is difficult to see which other of Poe's poems she might thus refer to, and though this funereal, astral poem may well have been conceived, if not written, at Virginia's bedside, we shall delay our analysis of this poem until later.

Miss Susan Cromwell, one of Poe's neighbours at Fordham, also gives us a picture of this time. One day, passing the cottage, she noticed Poe in the branches of the big tree, throwing down cherries to Virginia, who sat on the grassy bank, dressed in white. Her apron was full of cherries and he

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 712-714.

² *op. cit.*, p. 721.



MARIE LOUISE SHEW
(after an engraving from *The Poe Cult and Other Papers*)
(by Eugène L. Didier, reproduced by Mary F. Phillips in
Edgar Allan Poe—The Man)

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was going to fling down more when, suddenly, blood spurted from her lips. Poe leapt from the tree, picked up his wife and disappeared into the cottage. They were, adds Miss Cromwell, "*awful poor*".¹

But it was when winter set in, after the torrid summer, that the Poes were to experience a degree of hardship they had so far not known. That summer, Mrs. Clemm had been forced to many an expedient to keep her family fed. People had seen her at dusk, at Turtle Bay, digging up turnips meant for the cattle, in order to feed America's greatest poet. She also frequented the field paths to pick dandelions and, of course, "borrowed" from neighbours as occasion arose, even to the odd cents needed to collect some letter from the post-office. As winter set in, cold as the summer had been hot, a deeper solitude settled on the cottage. No more visitors came from town and Poe, out of work, was forced to remain indoors because of the cold. There were days when the larder was almost empty and their fuel was often very low.

It was in this icy cold and agonising poverty that Virginia's life drew to a close. She had been brought downstairs, for the large upstairs room was impossible to warm, and now lay in a nook off the parlour, so weak she could hardly rise from the bed, and incessantly tormented by her cough and fever. The days were bitterly cold and the nights colder, but there were no blankets on her bed.

Moved by their plight, the Bathhursts, their neighbours, helped with some little food and fuel, and Mrs. Clemm, braving the cold, would sally forth to "borrow" a few potatoes or eggs. But they were all underfed and the cold continued unabating.

In December, they were visited by Mrs. Gove Nichols, their only friend to brave the journey: she thus describes her visit:

"I saw her in her bed-chamber. Everything here was so neat, so purely clean, so scant and poverty-stricken, that I saw the poor sufferer with such a heartache as the poor feel for the poor.

"There was no clothing on the bed, which was only straw, but a snow-white counterpane and sheets. The weather was cold, and the sick lady had the dreadful chills that accompany the hectic fever of consumption. She lay in the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great-coat, with a large tortoise-shell cat in her bosom. The wonderful cat seemed conscious of her great usefulness. The coat and the cat were the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet. Mrs. Clemm was passionately

¹ *Israfel*, p. 716.

fond of her daughter, and her distress on account of her illness and poverty was dreadful to see.

"As soon as I was made aware of these painful facts, I came to New York and enlisted the services of a lady whose heart and hand were ever open to the poor and miserable. . ."¹

This new benefactress was Mrs. Marie Louise Shew, who had doubtless already met Poe. She was a strong-willed, intelligent woman, whose father had been a doctor and who had many medical friends. At one time she had trained as a nurse and done hospital duty. She was the most "scientific" of the women in Poe's life and also kind, generous and understanding. She at once sent Virginia "a feather-bed, an abundance of bed-clothing, and other comforts" and launched an appeal for the Poes, to which she invited contributions. The following week she herself brought Mrs. Clemm \$60 thus collected. Thereafter, her visits were frequent and her aid untiring.

The "Literati", thus made acquainted with Poe's wretched circumstances, could, for the moment, think of little else. Mrs. Hewitt and Mrs. Osgood at once gave their help, and the former opened a subscription list for Poe among the editors of various journals. Poe's poverty thus became publicly known. Soon after, the following paragraph appeared in the *New York Express*:

"We regret to learn that Edgar A. Poe and his wife are both dangerously ill with consumption, and that the hand of misfortune lies heavily upon their temporal affairs. We are sorry to mention the fact that they are so far reduced as to be barely able to obtain the necessities of life. This is indeed a hard lot, and we hope the friends and admirers of Mr. Poe will come promptly to his assistance in his bitterest hour of need".

This appeal to public charity hurt Poe's pride to the quick. Even Willis's more tactful appeal in the *Home Journal* was to offend him. Nevertheless, thanks to these efforts and, in especial, those of Mrs. Shew, Virginia was able to spend her last hours in comparative comfort.

Virginia, despite her approaching death, her fever and racking cough, swiftly resumed her childish gaiety whenever her friends gave her some small happiness or gift. As the year waned, Poe, while he sat near Virginia's bed, again began to work on his *Anthology*, while Muddy scanned the papers for cuttings concerning her Eddy. They now took her

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 722-723.

kindest - dearest friend - my poor Virginia
 still lives, although farling fast and now
 suffering much pain. May God grant her life
 until she sees you and thanks you once again!
 Her bosom is full to overflowing - like my own -
 with a boundless - inexpressible gratitude to you.
 Lest she may never see you more - she bids me
 say that she sends you her sweetest kiss of love
 and will die blessing you. But come - oh come
 to-morrow! Yes, I will be calm - everything
 you so nobly wish to see me. My mother sends
 you, also, her "warmer love and thanks" she
 begs me to ask you, if possible, to make arrange-
 ments at home so that you may stay with us
 to-morrow night. I enclose the order to the
 Postmaster

Heaven bless you and farewell

Edgar Poe.

Fordham,

Jan 29 47.

Facsimile letter from Poe to Mrs. Shew

Fordham: Virginia's Last Summer

illness so much for granted! Edgar, meanwhile, carried on a busy correspondence with friends. At times, anonymous letters would arrive, addressed to Virginia and penned, he imagined, by Mrs. Ellet; letters which abused him and poisoned the poor girl's last hours. Also there was the gratifying news that his work was beginning to be known in England, Scotland and France.

But Virginia could not always remain at death's door and the end was at hand. On January 29th, 1847, alarmed friends and relatives gathered at *Fordham* and, among them, Mary Devereaux, Poe's one-time sweetheart, to whom the little Virginia had carried his letters. To her surprise, she found Virginia sitting in a chair.

"The day before Virginia died," she wrote, "I found her in the parlor. I said to her, 'Do you feel any better to-day?' and sat down by the big armchair in which she was placed. Mr. Poe sat on the other side of her. I had my hand in hers, and she took it and placed it in Mr. Poe's, saying, 'Mary, be a friend to Eddie, and don't forsake him. He always loved you—didn't you, Eddie?' We three were alone, Mrs. Clemm being in the kitchen."¹

Mary returned that afternoon to New York and Poe's cousin, Mrs. Smith (Miss Herring), arrived. Towards evening, Poe wrote as follows to Mrs. Shew:

"Kindest—dearest friend—My poor Virginia still lives, although failing fast and now suffering much pain. May God grant her life until she sees you and thanks you once again! Her bosom is full to overflowing—like my own—with a boundless—inexpressible gratitude to you. Lest she may never see you more—she bids me say that she sends you her sweetest kiss of love and will die blessing you. But come—oh come tomorrow! Yes, I *will* be calm—everything you so nobly wish to see me. My mother sends you, also, her 'warmest love and thanks'. She begs me to ask you, if possible, to make arrangements at home so that you may stay with us tomorrow night. I enclose the order to the Postmaster.

Heaven bless you and farewell

Edgar A. Poe.

Fordham, Jan. 29, 47."²

Next morning, January 30th, in bitter cold, Mary and Mrs. Shew reached *Fordham* together and found Virginia in bed. That afternoon,

¹ *Israfel*, p. 726.

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 265.

her mind still clear, she gave Mrs. Shew a portrait of Edgar, and a jewel box taken from under her pillow. This was the jewel box bequeathed by Elizabeth Arnold to Rosalie, who may have left it behind on her recent visit. Virginia then asked for two letters written to Edgar by Frances Allan after he left home, letters she had once read to Mrs. Shew.¹ Darkness fell. And now, while Edgar must look on and re-experience, this time in reality, all the horrors of Rowena's death-struggle with Ligeia, Virginia, at last, ceases to gasp for breath and, lit by the candles, he sees her stiffen as once, long before, he had seen another woman's body sink into the immobility of death.

It was realised, after Virginia's death, that no likeness of her existed. One of the ladies present then made a swift watercolour sketch, that very portrait which, so often reproduced, transmits to us Poe's child-wife's features. Despite her wasting disease, her face remains full and round. (The open eyes are due to later retouching.)

Mrs. Shew provided the shroud and she, Mary Valentine and Poe's landlord's foster-daughter helped Mrs. Clemm to lay the body out.

On the day of the funeral, Virginia's small coffin was brought into the parlour and placed on her husband's desk. What more appropriate place, for had not her spirit been there always? A few friends gathered for the ceremony, among whom the Valentines (who owned the cottage), Willis and his partner, Mary Devereaux and Mrs. Shew. Then, through the bitter cold, the coffin was borne down an avenue of more or less "titanic" cypresses to the *Fordham* cemetery of the Dutch Reformed Church. Poe followed, wrapped in his old West Point cloak which, with Catterina, the cat, had helped so recently to warm his wife.

Back at the house, Poe collapsed. And such was Poe's poverty that Mrs. Clemm offered to sell Mary Devereaux Virginia's thimble. But this, Mary was too poor to buy.

¹ These letters, also seen by Eliza White, when in possession of Mrs. Smith, Poe's cousin, now, unfortunately, seem to be lost. They were said to be full of affection and entreaties to him to return.



VIRGINIA POE
1822-1847

(from a watercolour painted after death at Fordham)

CHAPTER XX

Fordham After Virginia

Ulalume and Eureka

POE now fell into a condition of utter prostration. The fearful winter with its hunger and cold, and his privations that Virginia might fare better, had taken their toll. But the causes behind this breakdown were mainly psychic. How else indeed could it be, when we remember all that Virginia meant to him, and how her death was the repetition of his first tragedy? From the age of three he had lived in constant mourning which now, reactivated, flared into a paroxysm of grief. He could not sleep, and darkness and solitude maddened him with terror. For hours Mrs. Clemm would sit by his bed with her hand on his forehead. When, thinking he slept, she thought of rising, he would murmur, "Not yet, Muddy, not yet".¹

Poe had again become a child with a child's fear of ghosts, the child who, when on horseback with his uncle, once showed such terror of a few graves. And cause, indeed, there was for fear in the house which, since the death of Rowena, was ruled by Ligeia's ghost.

We are told that "many times, after the death of his beloved wife, was he found at the dead hour of a winter night, sitting beside her tomb almost frozen in the snow, where he had wandered from his bed, weeping and wailing".² Thus did legend give concrete form to the poet's eternal grief, that grief which in his youth had led him to haunt the tomb of his "Helen"! Yet, given his condition, it seems hardly credible that, during this icy winter, he would indeed have visited Virginia's tomb by night. Besides, Maria Clemm's untiring vigilance would have prevented it.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 732.

² *Ibid*:

For Muddy now lavished on her foster-son all the maternal care Virginia no longer needed. Indeed, she seems to have grown doubly fond of him, now he was all she had.

Meanwhile, Muddy was still helped in her efforts to save him by the wise and generous friend who had eased Virginia's dying. Now Mrs. Shew brought them \$100, the proceeds of her appeal, one subscriber being General Scott, whose contribution to his former cadet's aid was made "with some evidences of emotion". Mrs. Shew also brought her friends, Doctors Mott and Francis to attend him. Last, but not least and, height of charity, she journeyed from New York to *Fordham* several times a week that her presence might comfort him. One of Maria Clemm's letters to Mrs. Shew, merely headed "Friday evening", though clearly belonging to this time, reveals the two motherly women in their care for the distracted widower.

"My dear sweet Friend,—I write to say that the medicines arrived the next train after you left to-day, and a kind friend brought them up to us that same hour. The cooling application was very grateful to my poor Eddie's head, and the flowers were lovely—not 'frozen' as you feared they would be. I very much fear this illness is to be a serious one. The fever came on at the *same time* to-day (as you said it would), and I am giving the sedative mixture. He did not rouse up to talk to Mr. C— as he would naturally do to so kind a friend. . . . Eddie made me promise to write you a note about the wine (which I neglected to tell you about this morning). He desires me to return the last box of wine you sent my sweet Virginia (there being some left of the first package, which I will put away for any emergency). The wine was a great blessing to us while *she needed it*, and by its cheering and tonic influence we were enabled to keep her a few days longer with us. The little darling always took it smiling, even when difficult to get it down. But for your timely aid, my dear Mrs. S., we should have had no last word—no loving messages—no *sweet farewells*, for she ceased to speak (from weakness) but with her beautiful eyes! . . . Eddie has quite set his heart upon the wine *going back to you*, thinking and hoping you may find it useful for the *sick artist* you mentioned 'as convalescent and in need of delicacies'. God bless you, my sweet child, and come soon to your sorrowing and desolate friend,

Maria Clemm.

"P.S.—We look for you in an early train tomorrow, and hope you will stay as long as possible. What we should do without you now is fearful to think of. Eddie says you promised Virginia to come every other day for a long time, or until he was able to go to work again. I

Fordham after Virginia

hope and believe *you will not fail him*; and I pray that every blessing may be yours, and may follow you in life, as your angelic tenderness and compassion deserve.

"Mr. C— will tell you of our condition, as he is going to call for this note in an hour's time; and, until we see you, farewell."¹

We thus see Mrs. Shew bestowing not only medicines and flowers but her time. She came with gifts and a compassionate heart. What more natural then, that the gratitude Poe felt—with his sick heart full of pent-up love and his eternal longing to be "the son"—should transmute itself into a more exalted emotion? We discern it already in the poem, *To M. L. S.*, published in March in the *Home Journal*, in which he speaks of a "presence as the morning", eyes "seraphic glancing" and how he thrills to think his spirit communes with an angel's. Though due allowance be made for poetic licence, we cannot but here sense the dawn of another "passion".

Two works issued from Poe's bereavement: the poem, *Ulalume*, and the cosmological essay, *Eureka*. We shall first consider the poem, which reveals more clearly the tomb from which he must fly.

When was *Ulalume* written? Before or at the same time as *Eureka*? Mrs. Whitman tells us Poe wrote it a year after Virginia died.² But since her dates are often inaccurate, it is not impossible, though she gives Poe as her authority, that she may simply be going by the poem and its reference—which, however, may be symbolic—to the anniversary of the burial of his love. But Mrs. Whitman herself seems in some doubt, for January, when Virginia died, has become October in the poem. The interval of a year, she therefore thinks, may be merely "ideal"³

ULALUME⁴

The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crisped and sere—
The leaves they were withering and sere;

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 390–391.

² *Poe and his Critics*, p. 26. Providence, 1st Edition, 1860. See also Mrs. Whitman's letter to Mrs. Clemm, New York, April 5th, 1859, in *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 426.

³ Mrs. Whitman to Mrs. Clemm, loc. cit., p. 427: "Perhaps the correspondence in time was purely ideal."

⁴ ULALUME: *American Whig Review* (sub-title "To —."), December, 1847; *Home Journal*, January 1, 1848; Griswold, 1850. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 213.) I quote the text of 1850, given in *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, pp. 102–105.

Poe's Life and Poems

It was night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year;
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir—
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul—
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were the days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll—
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate climes of the pole—
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

Our talk had been serious and sober,
But our thoughts they were palsied and sere—
Our memories were treacherous and sere—
For we knew not the night was October,
And we marked not the night of the year—
(Ah, night of all nights in the year!)
We noted not the dim lake of Auber—
Though once we had journeyed down here—
Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,
Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

And now, as the night was senescent
And star-dials pointed to morn—
As the star-dials hinted of morn—
At the end of our path a liquescent
And nebulous lustre was born,
Out of which a miraculous crescent
Arose with a duplicate horn—
Astarte's bediamonded crescent
Distinct with its duplicate horn

And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:
She rolls through an ether of sighs—
She revels in a region of sighs:

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She has seen that the tears are not dry on
 These cheeks, where the worm never dies
And has come past the stars of the Lion
 To point us the path to the skies—
 To the Lethean peace of the skies—
Come up, in despite of the Lion,
 To shine on us with her bright eyes—
Come up through the lair of the Lion,
 With love in her luminous eyes.”

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
 Said—“Sadly this star I mistrust—
 Her pallor I strangely mistrust:—
Oh, hasten!—oh, let us not linger!
 Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must.”
In terror she spoke, letting sink her
 Wings until they trailed in the dust—
In agony sobbed, letting sink her
 Plumes till they trailed in the dust—
 Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.

I replied—“This is nothing but dreaming:
 Let us on by this tremulous light!
 Let us bathe in this crystalline light!
Its Sybillic splendour is beaming
 With Hope and in Beauty tonight:—
 See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!
Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,
 And be sure it will lead us aright—
We safely may trust to a gleaming
 That cannot but guide us aright,
 Since it flickers up to Heaven through the night.’

Thus I pacified Psyche and kissed her,
 And tempted her out of her gloom—
 And conquered her scruples and gloom;
And we passed to the end of the vista,
 But were stopped by the door of a tomb—
 By the door of a legended tomb;
And I said,—“What is written, sweet sister,
 On the door of this legended tomb?”
She replied—“Ulalume—Ulalume—
 ’Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!”

Poe's Life and Poems

Then my heart it grew ashen and sober
As the leaves that were crisped and sere—
As the leaves that were withering and sere,
And I cried—"It was surely October
On *this* very night of last year
That I journeyed—I journeyed down here—
That I brought a dread burden down here—
On this night of all nights in the year,
Ah, what demon has tempted me here?
Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber—
This misty mid region of Weir—
Well I know, now, this dank tarn of Auber,
This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

The skies they were ashen and sober,/The leaves they were crisped and sere . . . It was night in the lonesome October/Of my most immemorial year. Thus, unwittingly, the poet passes from the time and place in which he mourns Virginia to that immemorial, timeless, forgotten and long-lost realm, where he similarly mourned a lost love.

It was hard by the dim lake of Auber . . . Here, once again we behold that *lake* whose menacing waters glimmer so lugubriously through Poe's work as symbol of the dead Mother. *It was down by the dank tarn of Auber/In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.* How well we know these ghouls, that band of Ligeias and Berenices whom Virginia had now joined with the spectral Mother at their head!

Here once, through an alley Titanic/Of cypress, I roamed with my soul . . . And indeed, it was through a cypress alley that Poe had followed Virginia's corpse to the grave. *These were days when my heart was volcanic/As the scoriac rivers that roll . . .* So, too, only a few months before Virginia's death, the poet's "volcanic heart" burnt for Frances Osgood as it was soon to burn for Marie Louise Shew and then others . . . *As the lavas that restlessly roll/Their sulphurous currents down Yaaneek/In the ultimate climes of the pole—* Here the juxtaposition of flame and ice is especially apposite. Poe was indeed "flame" in the intensity of his passion, but "ice" when identifying his later love objects with the original object of his passions, the mother who, dying or dead, he so often symbolised as frozen sea and *ultimate antarctic cold*.

And that amnesia which buries infancy's emotions and events, emotions and events which determine our lives, but which are generally forgotten because so immensely significant, and because of their forbidden

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"sex" content, could that be better indicated than in the next stanza?
Our talk had been serious and sober,/But our thoughts they were palsied and sere . . . For we knew not the month was October,/And we marked not the night of the year/(Ah, night of all nights in the year!)/We noted not the dim lake of Auber/(Though once we had journeyed down here)/Remembered not the dank tarn of Auber,/Nor the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here, indeed, Poe speaks truly for, when he accompanied Virginia's corpse to the grave, he did not, in fact, remember that long ago he had *journeyed down there*. Yet, that day of early February, now transformed into a night of October was, nevertheless, an anniversary and that of the most significant event in his life; that long past day in December when his mother was taken away.

The repetition-compulsion which unconsciously rules our lives and that vague sense we sometimes have of having experienced all this before, echo weirdly here. *Ulalume*, like all phantasies and dreams, though unguessed by the sleeper or day-dreamer, has one foot in the past and one in the present.

And now, as the night was senescent/And star-dials pointed to morn . . . At the end of our path a liquescent/And nebulous lustre was born,/Out of which a miraculous crescent/Arose with a duplicate horn—/Astarte's be-diamonded crescent/Distinct with its duplicate horn.

Here the mourning poet strives to escape from his fixation on the dead, and yearns to answer the summons of Venus Astarte and the life instinct, with their call like the morning star's. We have already said what we think of the symbolism of this poem—an opinion shared by many—and the way it reflects the secret tragedy of Poe's psycho-sexuality, compounded of emotional ardour and physical impotence.¹

*And I said—"She is warmer than Dian:/She rolls through an ether of sighs— . . ./She has seen that the tears are not dry on/These cheeks, where the worm never dies/And has come past the stars of the Lion/To point us the path to the skies—/To the Lethean peace of the skies.—*And so, indeed, it was: for the cheeks *where the worm never dies* were those of Poe enamoured of the dead, and his tears of mourning would in truth never dry. Yet Venus, great Venus herself, with her *crystalline light*, had risen to point a way through his darkness.

He yearns to respond, as always when some new passion rendered him for a time faithless to the mother, or to Virginia who embodied her. When

¹ Cf. pages 81-2.

his wife lay dying, he conceived his passion for Frances Osgood, and when Virginia was dead he languished for Marie Louise Shew. Yet we shall see how Virginia, though dead, was still to retain all her ascendancy as, before her, his dead mother had done.

Similarly, the poet's path to Astarte, his path to the star along which he would lead his soul, his Psyche, from the night of Virginia's grave, will follow the pattern of all his efforts at inconstancy, each of which represented an attempt to cure himself of his necrophilist fixation. On one hand he will find the road to Astarte barred by a tomb and, on the other, she will soon strangely resemble the dead mother whom she summons him to forsake. Thus, in this direction also, his path is barred.

First Astarte is shown us as distinct, thus visible, with a *duplicate horn*; the crescent, as it were, of the moon and so of Diana the chaste, cold, dead one. So distinct, indeed, is this crescent, that many a reader will confuse it with the Goddess of the moon, although Venus is intended as her diametrical opposite. Yet, whither does this Astarte lead? For though *she revels in a region of sighs*, that might be taken for love's sighs, she does not point to the heat of passion but *to the Lethean peace of the skies; i.e., to the kind of happiness enjoyed by the dead.*

Similarly, Poe's efforts to turn from Virginia, his consumptive, dying mother-figure of a wife, led him to fall in love with Frances Osgood who in many ways as much resembled his mother as Virginia had done, for she was physically frail, had black hair and large feverish eyes, and her general pallor and appearance were typically consumptive. In imagining this was escape, he but in fact returned, as by an irresistible summons, to her to whom he always remained fixated, the Mother who, though in death, never relinquished her prey. Thus, like the Babylonian Astarte, Poe's is also a maternal deity, symbol of carnal love and the life-force, but also of Death and the destructive forces. Not by chance does Psyche later attempt to hold him back and say she *strangely mistrusts* Astarte's *pallor*. We note, also, that Astarte appears to summon the poet Lethe-ward *in despite of the Lion, / To shine on us with her bright eyes— / Come up through the lair of the Lion, / With love in her luminous eyes*. Poe thus attributes to his Astarte the brilliant, luminous eyes which so irresistibly attracted him in women: eyes which he sang in *Ligeia* and *Annabel Lee*, eyes which appeared in his dreams¹ and were, in fact, the fever-bright eyes of Virginia, Mrs. Osgood and his mother who, long before either, had gazed on her little son *with love in her luminous eyes*.

¹ Cf. page 130, note 1.

Yet this goddess with loving eyes had come past *the stars of the Lion . . . in despite of the Lion . . . through the lair of the Lion*, so deep was her love for the poet. So too *neither the angels in heaven above—nor the demons down under the sea* could sever the poet from his Annabel Lee. Angels, demons and the Lion in its lair are evidently, each and all, symbols of that father (David Poe or John Allan) who disputed the small boy's possession of his mother, but never succeeded in severing them in Poe's unconscious.

But we must not forget that, for Poe, the Venus of *Ulalume*, despite all these attributes that attach her to the dead mother, primarily represented his urges towards other women. And if, faithful even in inconstancy, he always rediscovered the mother in the new object, nevertheless that inconstancy was always an effort at flight and the self-cure of his overpowering fixation.

That each such effort proved abortive was due, in fact, to the very strength of his fixation, which either barred his way with a tomb, or evoked from the love-object to which his inconstancy turned—as with Astarte who lights him to a tomb—the ineluctable and externally projected image of the dead woman who lay inside it.

Psyche now speaks: "*Sadly this star I mistrust . . . Oh! hasten!—oh, let us not linger! / Oh, fly!—let us fly!—for we must*" / *In terror she spoke, letting sink her / Wings until they trailed in the dust / Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.*

I believe this stanza to be of capital importance to our understanding of the strange nature of Poe's psycho-sexuality. It is as though a confession. For Psyche, terrified by Astarte's "pallor", commands her companion to fly. And that is exactly what Poe did whenever carnally tempted, in obedience to an irresistible inner command. Psyche is the poetic personification of this internal force. She dictates what he *must* do, namely, fly, thus what he *must not* do: proceed towards Astarte. It is a categorical imperative. Thereupon the poet, despite his reassuring reply and his tempting her to the end of the Cypress avenue, is forced to obey, for his path is stopped by the door of the tomb. Yet who is Psyche? Surely she resembles, though more didactically, the double of the hero in William Wilson who, as we shall see when analysing the tale, always accusingly appears whenever his evil side tempts, or leads him, to crime. Eventually, Wilson slays his double but, doing so, kills himself. William Wilson's double is, in fact, part of himself, equivalent to his moral conscience or, as psycho-analysts would say, his "super-ego".

Yet Psyche, though less overtly Poe's moral sense or conscience, is more didactic still and exacts greater obedience. She, also, is a super-ego,

an integral part of Poe's soul. But that super-ego is feminoid. And since psycho-analysis has taught us to recognise that our super-ego represents the introjection of those who first brought us up, and those we then loved, as well as the whole of the system which through our lives perpetuates the moral bans and precepts then instilled within us, we have ventured to assume that the Psyche in the poem, and William Wilson's double, derive from quite different sources in Poe. For whereas the hero of *William Wilson* is in open rebellion against the male super-ego deriving from the father's authority by which he is dogged, the hero of *Ulalume* is subject to the mother who commands him to shun Astarte. And such, in fact, was the case in Poe's life. It was less the father's Oedipal authority, than his fixation to the mother he knew as a child, which bound his sexuality through life.

Nor was this the first time Poe used Psyche to embody a transcendent, protective, mother imago. In the poem *To Helen*, written at fourteen, we suddenly find Helen call Psyche: "*Ah! Psyche, from the regions which/ Are Holy-Land!*" And this Psyche, a composite of Frances Allan, Mrs. Stanard, and all those feminine influences impressed on him as a boy, is she who, in *Ulalume*, withholds the adult on his path to Astarte.

Psyche is thus, on the one hand, Poe's mother, to whom he unconsciously remained faithful through life and, on the other, the educative mother who, by moral injunctions, protects her developing child from incest and sexual indulgence.

For what does Poe most fear? The *pallor* of Astarte, that deathly pallor which, since his mother's death, Poe always associated with his love-objects.

But why does Psyche fear this pallor, for the small Edgar must have loved the weakness and pallor that accompany the consumption of which his mother died. First he had loved her as he knew her in illness, then as he knew her in death: loved her in all her features, because she was what he loved most. Only later, probably with the Allans, when the small boy's precocious sexual urges had been repressed, would consciousness condemn his yearnings for the dead woman and therewith all sex: thereupon his desire for bodily union with the dead mother would be totally repressed. This urge then, in consciousness, instead of a positive, took on a negative sign, though it remained intact in the unconscious to engender *Ligeia*, *Annabel Lee* and *Ulalume*. In the psychic realm, this conflict between conscious horror and unconscious urges could only be solved by the compromise of an abnormally chaste life.

Thus, to all Astarte's dazzling appeals, Psyche's only answer is to

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command him to fly, in that terror, which drooped her wings *Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust.*

Readers unfamiliar with the strange, yet crude symbolic expressions, the unconscious at times employs, may find it difficult to follow me here, if, indeed, they have followed me thus far. But it seems to me that Psyche's drooping, trailing wings in this poem symbolise in concrete form Poe's physical impotence. We know that flying, to all races, unconsciously symbolises the sex act, and that antiquity often represented the penis erect and winged. In this poem, Psyche's trailing wings symbolise the fact that, however ardent his "ethereal" passions, Poe was impotent sexually.

For though he seeks to reassure his Psyche by saying: "*This is nothing but dreaming:/Let us on by this tremulous light! . . . Its Sybilic splendor is beaming/With Hope in Beauty tonight:/See!—it flickers up the sky through the night!/Ah, we safely may trust to its gleaming,/And be sure it will lead us aright— . . .*" it does not pacify her fears. However he caress and tempt *her out of her gloom* or conquer *her scruples and gloom* to lead her through the Cypress glade, the door of a tomb stops them: *the door of a legended tomb.* And when he asks, "*What is written, sweet sister,/On the door of this legended tomb?*" she answers "*Ulalume—Ulalume—/’Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume!*"

These strange fitful syllables flash through the poem's darkness like a sudden gleam of light. Whence did Poe take this name? None can say. But it does somewhat recall *Eulalie*, the title of a poem which he published in 1845 and which is clearly about Virginia. Eulalie is also aspected to Astarte, but here as a diurnal luminary who *shines all the day long . . . brilliant and strong* and, what is rare for Poe, the young Eulalie is not conducted to the grave. In the later poem however, Ulalume her sister accepts death in her place, and duly blocks the poet's path with the door of her tomb.

With the occurrence of this tomb which bars the way to Astarte, the symbolism of this poem becomes so concrete and clear, that several non-analyst writers have divined it correctly. For there we encounter the dead mother herself, and not merely her pallor projected on Astarte, nor her prohibition personified as Psyche. It is her tomb, her remains, which bar the poet from following the path to normal sexuality.

Thus, faced by this dismal barrier, the poet's heart becomes *ashen and sober/As the leaves that were crisped and sere—/As the leaves that were withering and sere. . . .* Thereupon, in sudden recollection he cries: "*It was surely October/On this very night of last year/That . . . I journeyed down here/That I brought a dread burden down here—/On this night of all nights*

in the year, / Ah, what demon has tempted me here? / Well I know, now, this dim lake of Auber— . . . / This ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir."

With this sudden recovery of memory, the poet can now recollect that, a year before, he had, in fact, "*brought a dread burden*" (Virginia's coffin) through an alley of Cypress, more or less *Titanic*, to the grave. Yet, if this memory, recent and ever-present should, at first, have been so dim and difficult to recover, it was doubtless because it masked another; that of a time and place when the small child had had to relinquish an earlier loved one to be confined and borne away. But to have been fully conscious of that memory, Poe's infantile amnesia would have had to be lifted. Thus, the recognition of the actual event is displaced and then seems that of a time and place, as happens in *déjà vu* experiences.¹ What Poe *should* have remembered was the intimate connection of two events and two immense bereavements; what he *did* remember was *this night of all nights in the year, the lake and the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.*²

This supernal, sepulchral poem issued from the furthest depths of Poe's mourning spirit. If, to the poetry-lover it is one of Poe's loveliest, most original poems, to the psycho-analyst it is a document of prime importance on the tragedy of his life.

¹ Cf. FREUD: *Fausse Reconnaissance* ("Déjà Raconté") in *Psycho-Analytic Treatment. Collected Papers*, (London, Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1924-1925), Vol. II, p. 334. Translated from: *Über fausse reconnaissance* ("déjà raconté") während der psychoanalytischen Arbeit. *Gesammelte Werke*, Band X, London, Imago Publishing Co., 1946),

² At Mrs. Whitman's suggestion, Poe suppressed the last stanza of the poem, which detracted from its effectiveness, for the climax of interest is reached when memory returns to the poet.

This stanza merely emphasises the guilty nature of the desires inspired by Astarte, as well as the dread and mysterious character of the *secret* that lay *hidden in these wolds*.

The suppressed lines are given in the *Virginia Edition* (Vol. 7, p. 213) as follows:

Said *we* then—the two, then—"Ah, can it
Have been that the woodlandish ghouls,
The pitiful, the merciless ghouls—
To bar up our way and to ban it
From the secret that lies in these wolds—
From the thing that lies hidden in these wolds—
Had drawn up the spectre of a planet
From the limbo of lunar souls,
This sinfully scintillant planet
From the Hell of the planetary souls?"

Fordham after Virginia

Annabel Lee told us how Poe, in his unconscious, continued faithful to the mother re-embodied in Virginia. *Ulalume* explains why he was never able to free himself from her, in spite of his repeated efforts to flee. *Annabel Lee* may be said to be the positive, *Ulalume* the negative treatment of one theme.

* * *

The cold passed and Spring visited the cottage from which Virginia had departed.

“As spring advanced,” wrote Mrs. S. A. Weiss,¹ “he and Mrs. Clemm laid out some flower beds in the front garden and planted them with flowers and vines given by the neighbours, until when in May the cherry tree again blossomed” (under which blood had flowed from Virginia’s mouth) “the little abode assumed quite an attractive appearance. Upon an old settle left by a former tenant, and which Mrs. Clemm’s skilful hands had mended and scrubbed and stained into respectability and placed beneath the cherry tree as a garden seat Poe might now often be seen reclining; gazing up into the branches, where birds and bees flitted in and out, or talking and whistling to his own pets, a parrot and bobolink, whose cages hung in the branches . . . Here . . . on returning from one of his long sunrise rambles, he would rest until summoned by his mother to his frugal breakfast . . . a pretzel and two cups of strong coffee, or when there was no pretzel, the crusty part of a loaf with a bit of salt herring as a relish. . . He was fond of fruit, and his sister said, of buttermilk and curds, which they obtained from their rural neighbors. . .”

Such is our second picture of Poe the widower, at *Fordham*: one in utter contrast to the first, where we saw him crushed by grief in icy winter. But it would be erroneous to imagine that this description implied a return to health. Far from it for, if he now found it impossible to remain at home and went for endless rambles, it was because his extreme depression was changing into a condition of hypomanic excitement. Now, even at night, he often found it difficult to go home and would roam for hours through the countryside. One favourite haunt was the grassy road over the High Bridge aqueduct, raised on tall granite arches. There, poised between heaven and the illimitable landscape, he communed with his soul. There, too, according to Mrs. Whitman, *Ulalume* and *Eureka* were thought out and written.

¹ Susan Archer Weiss, *The Home Life of Poe*: New York, Broadway Publishing Co., 1907, pp. 150–151, after *Israfel*, p. 738.

For hours Poe would pace this path with the stars his sole companions, those stars which had so drawn him since he first viewed them through the telescope on John Allan's balcony. Or he would linger amid the pines and cedars which covered a ledge of rock near the cottage. If, however, he stayed at home, Muddy was called to dispel the dreaded solitude of the garden or house.

"He never liked to be alone," wrote Mrs. Clemm, "and I used to sit up with him, often until four o'clock in the morning, he at his desk, writing, and I dozing in my chair. When he was composing *Eureka* we used to walk up and down the garden, his arm around me, mine around him, until I was so tired I could not walk. He would stop every few minutes and explain his ideas to me, and ask if I understood him. I always sat with him when he was writing, and gave him a cup of hot coffee every hour or two."¹

For Poe had entered a period of hypomania, every whit as intense as his preceding depressive attack, and had begun to write *Eureka*.

We shall deal with the deeper analytic significance of *Eureka* when we consider Poe's tales. But its psychiatric significance may and must be indicated at this point, for some of his admirers consider it the high point of his genius. In fact, however, despite its stylistic, dialectical merits, it primarily issues from a mind labouring under abnormal excitement and suffering from delusions of grandeur. In those directions it was the furthest he ever reached.

In *Eureka*, Poe, although no scientist, imagined himself gifted with supernatural logic and confronts the riddle of the universe. Greater than Newton, Leibnitz or Laplace, who all, says Poe, lacked the intuition and imaginative powers to perceive the Principle behind the Law, he has discovered and revealed to man the secret of the Universe. Furthermore, "the ground covered by the great French astronomer compares with that covered" by Poe's theory as "a bubble compares with the ocean upon which it floats".²

Poe scorns both Aristotelian "deduction" and Baconian "induction". Only "Intuition" counts and the "Oneness" which it reveals. Then, in under one hundred and fifty pages, Poe proceeds to expound the Cosmos as revealed by his unique supernatural intuition.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 735.

² *Poe to Charles Fenno Hoffman*, Fordham, September 20, 1848. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 302.)

Fordham after Virginia

In the beginning was God. God one day emitted the Particle Proper, from which, by successive spherical irradiations into space, were derived the multiple forms of matter which comprise the universe of atoms and stars, that being spherical and finite whereas the universe of space is infinite. The initial act of Divine Volition being accomplished, two opposing principles then dominated the universe: Repulsion (the equivalent of electricity) whose function is to prevent, for a time, the junction of atoms, *i.e.*, from yielding to the second principle, and Attraction, which, in a reaction to the original process of Radiation, represents the atom's irresistible tendency to return to primal Oneness. This latter tendency forms the basis of Newton's law of universal gravitation. Although somewhat retarded by the force of Repulsion, the force of Attraction is bound to triumph in the end and to recall every atom to its original centre. Thereupon, the Universe, born of nothingness, will once more return to nothingness, and God alone will persist. The soul, re-absorbed in God, will itself become God: Poe will become Jehovah. Poe seems, indeed, to have felt an inner need to identify himself with God, *i.e.*, with the Father to whom his sick soul, bereaved of woman and disappointed by life, now turned for refuge. We shall later revert to this phase of megalomania and mysticism from which *Eureka* was born.

The nights spent by Poe on the High Bridge aqueduct under the stars, dreaming of God and the universe's ultimate secrets; his feverish activity until dawn, writing the cosmic visions that would revolutionise the world while Mrs. Clemm dosed him with coffee; his permanent insomnia and mental excitement, all point to his mental disturbance at this time.

Late in 1847, Poe, intoxicated by his genius and anxious to acquaint the world with his "discoveries", prepared to reveal them to the world, his friend Willis having arranged for him to lecture on *Eureka* in the hall of the *Society Library*, New York. The profits, it was intended, should help to launch the yet unborn *Stylus*.

Poe reappeared in public on February 3rd, 1848. The night was rainy and the lecture-room cold, and a shivering audience of about sixty listened for two and a half hours to what one described as a "rhapsody of the most intense brilliancy" on God the Beginning and End, and on the Particle Proper, Radiation, Repulsion and Attraction. Most of his listeners, however, found it extremely hard to follow, and the newspaper reports gave absurd travesties of the lecture. Poe felt injured and, in letters to friends, strove to explain all he had tried to say and the vast importance of his subject. "What I have propounded will (in good time) revolutionize

the world of Physical and Metaphysical Science. I say this calmly—but I say it".¹

This lecture brought in barely \$50, far too little to float the *Stylus*. Poe, now certain of his scientific genius put his theories into a book and offered *Eureka* "with flashing eyes and exuberant enthusiasm" to Putnams, who had already published two of his books. So convinced was he of its importance, that he solemnly suggested a first edition of fifty thousand copies. These, he was sure, would immediately sell and make both their fortunes. George P. Putnam listened attentively and ventured on an edition of five hundred copies.

Eureka, A Prose Poem, as Poe, more appropriately than he knew, entitled it, appeared in March 1848, dedicated to Alexander von Humboldt. It was slow to sell but Poe, nevertheless, continued to think himself the greatest living genius.

Even geniuses must live, however, and so laying aside his high speculations, Poe turned to lecturing on more accessible subjects at Providence and Lowell. *The Philosophy of Composition*, "rationalised" the construction of the popular *The Raven* and poetry generally, while *The Poetic Principle* dealt with what, for Poe, was poetry's main theme, the death of some lovely woman. Thus he again minted a little coin.

Despite his infatuation with God and the universe, powerful though that intoxicant was, Poe's heart craved love. As eternal as his grief was his need for protection and mothering by a woman. And though Mrs. Clemm, as ever, remained the haven to which his sick, menaced being turned, he still dreamt of a love which would combine the mother and the ideal beloved.

Mrs. Shew, the good angel who had eased Virginia's last hours and comforted Poe's grief, continued at hand. Though not especially literary—she had read but little of his work—and more interested in medicine, she had a better idea of her protégé than any of his literary "flames". Her mind was clear and well-balanced and her heart intuitive and kind. Besides food and clothing, she had brought him sympathy and understanding of his moral and physical ills.

When, in Spring 1848, Poe began more often to visit New York, he found her house as open as her heart. Supreme kindness—she even let him arrange her reception rooms according to the canons enunciated in *The Philosophy of Furniture!* The manner in which he thanks her for

¹ *Poe to Eveleth*, New York, February 29, 1848 (*Israfel*, p. 742).

Fordham after Virginia

this privilege well shows the rapture she inspired in the dreamer of *Eureka*:

... "Louise! my brightest, most unselfish of all who ever loved me! . . . I shall have so much pleasure in thinking of you and yours in that music-room and library. Louise, I give you great credit for taste in these things, and I know I can please you in the purchases. During my first call at your house after my Virginia's death, I noticed with so much pleasure the large painting over the piano, which is a masterpiece indeed; and I noticed the size of all your paintings, the scrolls instead of set figures of the drawing-room carpet, the soft effect of the window shades, also the crimson and gold. . . I was charmed to see the harp and piano uncovered. The pictures of Raphael and 'The Cavalier' I shall never forget—their softness and beauty! The guitar with the blue ribbon, music-stand and antique jars! I wondered that a little country maiden like you had developed so classic a taste and atmosphere. . . " ¹

Like his earlier "Helen", Marie Louise Shew led Edgar back to those "classic" shores sacred to the protective mother *imago*. Meekly he followed her about and even accompanied her to church, something he had not done since far-off Richmond days. With her, he joined in the hymns in his fine tenor voice and still remembered the responses last uttered beside Frances Allan. As Spring advanced Poe, in his desperate attachment to her, spent ever more time at her house. He craved her affection and care and, indeed, now needed them more than ever.

Even the year before, a short trip to Philadelphia, to place some articles with Graham, had ended ominously. Less able than ever to hold his liquor, he had started drinking with disastrous results. This time it appears to have been Peterson, his former colleague on *Graham's*, who rescued him and, horribly ill, sent him home to Mrs. Clemm. "Without your aid, at the precise moment and in the precise manner in which you rendered it, it is more than probable that I should not now be alive to write you this letter", Poe wrote after reaching Fordham. ²

From the diary left us by Mrs. Shew, we read the account of another of Poe's attacks which occurred in Spring 1848. They were sitting in a small conservatory, in her house, that gave on the garden. During tea, Poe complained he had a poem to write but lacked inspiration. Mrs. Shew, wishing to help him, then brought pen, ink and paper and set them on a table. At that moment the sound of church bells throbbed in the air. Poe,

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Shew, "Sunday Night". (Virginia Edition, Vol. 17, p. 297.)*

² *Israfel*, p. 738

whose nerves and hearing seem, at this time, to have been hyperacute, then declared: "I so dislike the noise of bells to-night, I cannot write. I have no subject, I am exhausted".

Mrs. Shew then pretended to mimic his style and wrote down: "The bells, the little silver bells", whereupon Poe finished the stanza and then relapsed into his apathetic condition. She, however, urged him to continue and wrote "The heavy iron bells". Again Poe expanded this into a stanza, after which he copied the whole poem, headed it "by Mrs. M. L. Shew", and remarked that it was her poem, "as she had suggested and composed so much of it". After dinner he was got to bed and "lapsed into a coma". Dr. Francis was sent for and together they sat watching over him. His pulse was weak and irregular. Dr. Francis then remarked "he has a heart disease and must die young". Mrs. Shew had already observed these symptoms. Both felt that Poe's end, or insanity, were near. That night he slept for twelve hours and, next day, returned to *Fordham* with Dr. Francis.

According to her account of Poe's condition that day—his apathy and the hyper-acuity of his hearing—Poe seems rather to have been under opium than drink. But it is also possible that he was then again beginning to drink as always, when his platonic passions, increasing in intensity, threatened him with the possibility of sexual expression. Then, as we saw, he sought refuge in the tavern and his appearing, drunk, before his beloved, would be his method of self-defence. Be that as it may, whatever drug Poe took that day, *The Bells* was written: a poem again joining Hymen and Death. Dr. Francis spoke only too truly when, after this attack, he told Poe that his days were numbered unless he renounced every excess.

Meanwhile Mrs. Shew found friendship with Poe more and more difficult. She was no poetess, like Mrs. Osgood, to be intoxicated by the "great poet's" platonic passion. Poe, to her, was a patient, a great and most unhappy patient, it is true, or at most, a friend, though it was difficult to continue friends with one so excitable and, in some ways, compromising. Eventually, Poe's behaviour seemed so wild that, in June, she decided their friendship must end and wrote asking him to cease his visits, while she herself, she said, would not again visit *Fordham*. Poe's despairing reply shows how intensely exalted his platonic passion for this motherly woman had become:

"Can it be true, Louise, that you have the idea fixed in your mind to desert your unhappy and unfortunate friend and patient? . . . So I have had premonitions of this for months. I repeat, my good spirit, my loyal

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heart! must this follow as a sequel to all the benefits and blessings you have so generously bestowed? Are you to vanish like all I love, or desire, from my darkened and 'lost soul'? I have read over your letter again and again, and cannot make it possible . . . that you wrote it in your right mind. (*I know you did not without tears of anguish and regret.*) Is it possible your influence is lost to me? Such tender and true natures are ever loyal until death; but you are not dead, you are full of life and beauty! Louise, you came in . . . in your floating white robe—"Good morning, Edgar". There was a touch of conventional coldness in your hurried manner, and your attitude as you opened the kitchen-door to find Muddie, is *my last remembrance of you*. There was love, hope, and sorrow in your smile, instead of love, hope, and *courage* as ever before. O Louise, how many sorrows are before you! Your ingenuous and sympathetic nature will be constantly wounded in its contact with the hollow, heartless world; and for me, alas! unless some true and tender, and pure womanly love saves me, I shall hardly last a year longer alive! A few short months will tell how far my strength (physical and moral) will carry me in life here. How can I believe in Providence when *you* look coldly upon me? Was it not you who renewed my hopes and faith in God? . . . and in humanity? Louise, I heard your voice as you passed out of my sight leaving me . . . ; but I still listened to your voice. I heard you say with a sob, 'Dear Muddie'. I heard you greet *my Catarina*, but it was only as a memory . . . nothing escaped *my ear*, and I was convinced it was not your generous self . . . repeating words so foreign to your nature—to your tender heart! I heard you sob out your sense of duty to my mother, and I heard her reply, 'Yes, Louise . . . yes' . . . I felt my heart stop, and I was sure I was then to die before your eyes. Louise, it is well—it is fortunate—you looked up with a tear in your dear eyes, and raised the window, and talked of the guava you had brought for my sore throat. . . Louise, I feel I shall not prevail—a shadow has already fallen upon your soul, and is reflected in your eyes. It is *too late*—you are floating away with the cruel tide . . . it is not a common trial—it is a fearful one to me. Such rare souls as yours so beautify this earth! so relieve it of all that is repulsive and sordid . . . but you must know and *be assured* of my regret and my sorrow if aught I have written has hurt you. *My heart never wronged you*. I placed you in *my esteem*—in *all solemnity*—beside the friend of my boyhood—the mother of my school-fellow, of whom I told you. . ."¹

Mrs. Shew, however, remained firm and disappeared from his life like her other "mother" predecessors.

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Shew*, June, 1848. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 298–300.)

Only Muddy now remained to answer his immense need. His lovely sonnet to her was doubtless written at this time.

TO MY MOTHER¹

Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,
The angels, whispering to one another,
Can find, among their burning terms of love,
None so devotional as that of "Mother",
Therefore by that dear name I long have called you—
You who are more than mother unto me,
And fill my heart of hearts, where Death installed you,
In setting my Virginia's spirit free.
My mother—my own mother, who died early,
Was but the mother of myself; but you
Are mother to the one I loved so dearly,
And thus are dearer than the mother I knew
By that infinity with which my wife
Was dearer to my soul than its soul-life.

This poem, alone of Poe's works, expressly mentions his mother, embodied as Mrs. Clemm.

Despite this tribute, however, she was only his "Muddy", whose very name, as we saw, not only suggested "mother" but the menial tasks she performed with such boundless and modest devotion. It was not she who could gratify all her son sought in imagination.

Thus, somewhat later that summer, Poe, his Marie Louise Shew forgotten, sought to draw his Psyche to new Astartes risen on his horizon.

¹ TO MY MOTHER: *Flag of our Union*, 1849. The text quoted is that of wold, 1850; (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 116.)



SARAH HELEN WHITMAN
1803-1878
(from a portrait by C. J. Thompson)

CHAPTER XXI

Providence and Lowell

Helen and Annie

SARAH HELEN POWER WHITMAN was a poetess: a pretty, fluttering, ailing and rather affected little woman who wore white billowing draperies. Sensitive in the extreme, the slightest coarseness was likely to make her swoon, as was then fashionable, at which times she would put an ether-moistened handkerchief to her nose.

It was a period when American "transcendentalism" was merging into spiritualism for many, and Helen Whitman was of those who dwelt on the threshold of the "Beyond". She had been called the "Seeress of Providence" and was widely known as a spiritualist, poet and beauty. Widowed some ten years before, she was at this time forty and still possessed much charm. Besides, as Poe was soon to write, "Has the soul age?" As it happened, he had greatly admired her poems, even before they met, and the great critic, ever inclined to adulate woman, found her verse truly poetic, though to-day it seems colourless and mawkish. But Helen voiced feelings Poe also felt and so must be a true soul-sister. Other loves, however, then claimed his attention and when, in 1845, he went to Providence to see Mrs. Osgood, he refused to be taken to visit the Seeress.

That was in Summer and while Mrs. Osgood attended a lecture, he passed Mrs. Whitman's house and saw her, in the moonlight, taking the air at her door. Her "poetical" appearance charmed him and made a great impression, which later he set down in his poem, *To Helen*, where the doorstep becomes a moonlit rose garden and her eyes (always to Poe a woman's main attraction) "two sweetly scintillant Venuses". But this first vision occurred during the pre-eminence of Frances Osgood, after which came Virginia's long illness and death, then Mrs. Shew and *Ulalume* and *Eureka*.

Poe's Life and Poems

Now his *Eureka* dream was ended and Mrs. Shew had vanished after Mrs. Osgood; Muddy alone remained to fill the void left by Virginia. For one who still thirsted for love and glory there was little to assuage him at home. What more natural then, that he should turn in imagination to Providence and its poetic luminary, especially when we learn that Mrs. Whitman made the first approach?

In February 1848, when Poe still worshipped at Mrs. Osgood's shrine, Mrs. Whitman, at a Miss Lynch's Valentine-day party, recited a poem she had written to Poe's *Raven*. Evidently, the then illustrious bird had impressed her greatly and she, herself, would doubtless have heard echoes of the effect she had made on Poe. This Valentine, of which we omit five stanzas, ran thus:

“Oh! thou grim and ancient Raven,
From the Night's Plutonic shore,
Oft in dreams, thy ghastly pinions
Wave and flutter round my door—
Oft thy shadow dims the moonlight
Sleeping on my chamber floor.

Romeo speaks of ‘White doves trooping
Amid crows athwart the night’,
But to see thy dark wing swooping
Down the silvery path of light,
Amid swans and dovelets stooping,
Were, to me, a nobler sight. . .

Then, Oh! Grim and Ghastly Raven!
Wilt thou to my heart and ear
Be a Raven true as ever
Flapped his wings and croaked ‘Despair’?
Not a bird that roams the forest
Shall our lofty eyrie share.”¹

Miss Lynch, through Mrs. Osgood, sent Poe this poem and, though she did not divulge its author, he recognised it as Mrs. Whitman's hand. Soon after, to his great pleasure, it was published in the *Home Journal*.

In June, Mrs. Shew broke off their friendship and, about this time,

¹ *Israfel*, p. 761.

some Fordham neighbours gave a moonlight party at which one of the "Literati", Maria Mac-Intosh, heard Poe rave about Mrs. Whitman. Doubtless she related this to her friend soon after, on her return to Providence. There, for a time, matters remained.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Locke, Frances Osgood's sister-in-law, had arranged for Poe to lecture at Lowell. His subject was *The Poetic Principle*, and the date, July 10th. It was on this visit to Lowell that Poe first met Mrs. Richmond.

Love flared up in an instant and in *Landor's Cottage* he describes how deeply he was moved by their first meeting.

"As no bell was discernible, I rapped with my stick against the door, which stood half open. Instantly a figure advanced to the threshold—that of a young woman about twenty-eight years of age—slender, or rather slight, and somewhat above the medium height. As she approached, with a certain *modest decision* of step altogether indescribable, I said to myself:—'Surely here I have found the perfection of natural, in contradistinction from artificial *grace*. . . The second impression which she made on me, but by far the more vivid of the two, was that of *enthusiasm*. So intense an expression of *romance*, perhaps I should call it, or of unworldliness, as that which gleamed from her deep-set eyes, had never so sunk into my heart of hearts before. I know not how it is, but this peculiar expression of the eye, wreathing itself occasionally into the lips, is the most powerful, if not absolutely the *sole* spell, which rivets my interest in woman. 'Romance', provided my readers fully comprehend what I would here imply by the word—'romance' and 'womanliness' seem to me convertible terms: and, after all what man truly *loves* in woman, is, simply, her *womanhood*. The eyes of Annie (I heard someone from the interior call her 'Annie, darling!') were 'spiritual gray'; her hair, a light chestnut: this is all I had time to observe of her."¹

Hervey Allen justly observes that, although the woman in *Landor's Cottage* is Mrs. Richmond, the cottage itself much resembles Poe's house at *Fordham*, a fact which possibly reveals how greatly he desired to install her there.

But although Annie could not share his home, Poe could share hers and so spent many a happy hour with Annie, her husband, her sister Sarah and the little Caddy. It was heaven to him to be near his Annie.

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 6, pp. 268–269.

Thus Poe was caught between two dawning passions: two Venus-Astartes had risen simultaneously in his sky. Mrs. Whitman attracted him by her fame as a poet, her great cultivation (greater than that of any woman he had known) and her part-genuine, part-affected languor as well as the fact that, as a widow, she could invite the Raven to share her "eyrie". That "eyrie" was also gilded, for her fortune amounted to some \$8300. Though there was malice in the tales that only self-interest inspired Poe's later schemes of marriage, and in Barine's¹ charge that he twice sought to marry "old and ugly" widows for their money, the prospect of emerging from poverty, of providing for Muddy and at last starting his *Stylus* would, nevertheless, have certainly played some part. Had there been no element of passion, it is sure no such idea would have entered his mind but, given passion, security would have been welcome.

Nor must we forget that Poe, although near forty, still remained a "foster-child" in spirit. Not for nothing had the precocious child, whom everything affected with such intensity, been adopted at three by a wonderful foster-mother, after losing the mother he adored. Thus, that repetition-compulsion which governs our lives was always to make him long for re-adoption. It had come to pass with Mrs. Clemm, but the humble Muddy no longer sufficed. And since psycho-analysis has shown that gifts of money are unconsciously equated with gifts of love, Poe's taking money from a rich and motherly woman, by whom he was loved, could neither humiliate nor degrade him, but only repeat the magical thing that had happened to him as a child—his adoption by the rich and beautiful Frances Allan. These were the trumps Helen Whitman held.

Annie Richmond, however, had youth on her side and, supreme virtue to one so sexually repressed as Poe, was married: thus, he could imagine her morally and legally out of reach. Also, she had a father, mother, sister and child, in fact a family such as that into which he had once been adopted. And if, on one hand, Mrs. Whitman was named Helen, like the love of his adolescence, which linked them in his unconscious, Annie too could charm him with her name as well as her other virtues. For was not *Richmond* where he had lost and found a mother, the town where he was raised and his mother's city? Even her name Annie linked her with Anne Valentine, his loved "Aunt Nancy", the surrogate, in her time, of the small boy's foster-mother, Frances Allan.

As for their eyes, always what most attracted him in women, Poe praised equally Annie's and Helen's.

¹ Arvède Barine, *Poètes et névrosés*: Paris, Hachette, 1908, pp. 256-257.

But there was something in him stronger even than his attraction to these women. Nor was it that he was torn between two passions, a conflict impossible to resolve, that forced him to seek flight. It was the eternal compulsion in him to fly from any woman when, as a woman, she attracted him too greatly. That was why, in July, after reaching New York from Lowell, Poe felt the urge to leave Muddy at *Fordham*, and journey to Richmond with his heart full of Annie.

The ostensible object of his visit was to collect subscribers to the *Stylus*, but first and foremost he was fleeing from Annie. He fled her as he generally fled women: in the tavern. Thus, on reaching Richmond on July 19th, he promptly vanished. Some days later, John R. Thompson, Chief Editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, learnt by chance that his predecessor had been seen, near the water-front, in a pitiable condition. A year later Thompson was to write:

. . . "If you have ever visited Richmond, you may perhaps know that the business portion of the town and the sites occupied by residences exclusively are distant from the shipping by a mile and a half, so that very few persons not actually engaged in commercial affairs ever visit the landing at all. As soon as I heard the name Poe in this connection my worst suspicions were excited, and I at once took a carriage and went to seek him. . . When I reached the purlieu of this abandoned quarter, I learned that such a person had indeed been there, drunk, for two weeks, and that he had gone a few hours previous, without hat or coat, to the residence of Mr. Jack MacKenzie, some three miles distant in the country, alone and on foot. It was Poe. The next day he called on me with Mr. (Jack) MacKenzie . . . I did all I could to restrain his excesses and to relieve the pressure of his immediate wants (for he was extremely indigent) but no influence was adequate to keep him from the damnable propensity to drink. . ."¹

Poe continued some weeks at Richmond and often visited the hospitable Mackenzies at their home, *Duncan Lodge*. Jack Mackenzie had always been his good friend and there he again met Rosalie, his sister. He also saw other old friends, among whom his chum, Robert Stanard, son of his first "*Helen*", as also the painter, Robert Sully, who may have painted his portrait at this time. He also sought out Catherine Potiaux, his sweetheart at six, but in no state for her to receive him. Most of this period Poe spent in taverns where, when not too drunk, he would declaim from

¹ *Thompson to Patterson*, Richmond, November 9, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 404; *Israfel*, p. 765.)

Eureka or recite *The Raven*. But also he visited newspaper and magazine offices, and placed an odd article here and there.

Poe's meagre resources had run out and though Thompson charitably took *The Rationale of Verse* (written some time earlier as a lecture) for the *Messenger*, Poe was soon penniless and had won no subscribers to the *Stylus*.

A rather absurd incident marked the end of this visit. The chief editor of the Richmond *Examiner*, a Mr. Daniel, friendly with one of Mrs. Whitman's relatives, was reported to have said that Poe's motives towards that lady were anything but disinterested. This being repeated to Poe in a newspaper office, he, greatly enraged, seized a pen and immediately scribbled a challenge to Daniel on a newspaper heading. Daniel ignored the matter, but Poe continued to press for a duel.

Daniel then invited Poe to his office, where he sat behind two huge old-fashioned pistols. On Poe's demanding why he was required, Daniel explained that, to avoid police interference, the duel were best fought out in his office. Poe awoke to the oddity and gravity of his position, explanations followed and the matter ended.

Meanwhile, in Providence, one hot July night, Miss Mac-Intosh, lately back from New York, told Mrs. Whitman, in her moonlit garden, how Poe had raved about her at *Fordham* that June. Though Miss Blackwell, also present, did her best to warn her against him, the touched and flattered poetess sent him these unsigned verses containing a veiled invitation to the meeting she knew he desired:

"A low bewildering melody
Is murmuring in my ear—
Tones such as in the twilight wood
The aspen thrills to hear
When Faunus slumbers on the hill
And all entrancéd boughs are still.

The jasmine twines her snowy stars
Into a fairer wreath—
The lily through my lattice bars
Exhales a sweeter breath—
And, gazing on night's starry cope,
I dwell with 'Beauty which is Hope'."¹

¹ *Israfel*, p. 772.

This romantic missive, in a hand he recognised, reached Poe at Richmond on September 10th, doubtless about the time of his abortive duel, or shortly after. Poe thereupon abandoned all thought of canvassing subscribers to the *Stylus* and returned to *Fordham* to prepare to visit Providence.

"... but I have not told you", Poe was later to write to Mrs. Whitman, "that your Ms. lines reached me in Richmond on the very day in which I was about to depart on a tour and an enterprise which would have changed my very nature—steeped me in a stern, cold, and debasing, although brilliantly gigantic ambition—and borne me 'far, far away and, forever from *you*, sweet, sweet Helen, and from this divine dream of your love".¹

It has been suggested that Poe here alluded either to his impending duel, or to his possible marriage with Mrs. Shelton. It is, however, almost certain that Poe did not see his Elmira during this stay in Richmond. The tour and enterprise of which he speaks, like the ambition, can only refer to plans concerning the *Stylus*.

The *Stylus* being for the moment abandoned, Poe's only thought was to hasten to his new Helen's call. Returning to New York, he furnished himself with a letter of introduction from Miss Mac-Intosh and then, disguising his hand, wrote to Mrs. Whitman as from an autograph collector, Edward S. T. Gray, intending to discover whether she was then at Providence. She was and, late that September, Poe himself appeared and presented his introduction.

Poe thus describes their meeting in a letter after his return to *Fordham*:

... "And now, in the most simple words I can command, let me paint to you the impression made upon me by your personal presence. As you entered the room, pale, hesitating, and evidently oppressed at heart; as your eyes rested for one brief moment upon mine, I felt, for the first time in my life, and tremblingly acknowledged, the existence of spiritual influences altogether out of the reach of reason. I saw that you were *Helen—my Helen*—the Helen of a thousand dreams. . . She whom the great Giver of all good had pre-ordained to be mine—mine only—if not now, alas! then hereafter and *for ever* in the Heavens. —You spoke falteringly and seemed scarcely conscious of what you said. I heard no words—only the soft voice more familiar to me than mine own. . .

"Your hand rested within mine and my whole soul shook with a

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman*, October 18, 1848. (*Israfel*, pp. 772-773.)

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tremulous ecstasy: and then, but for the fear of grieving or wounding you, I would have fallen at your feet in as pure—in as real a worship as was ever offered to Idol or to God.”¹

Having met, the two then went for a stroll in the cemetery, in which Poesque setting, Edgar, while “bitter, bitter tears” filled his eyes, declared his love: “Helen, I love now—now—for the first and only time.”²

Doubtless it was during this funereal lovers’ stroll that Poe told her the story of his first Helen, which she was later to record in a little book that shows us the boy Poe haunting his beloved’s grave through the cold autumn nights.³ Helped by their similar names, Poe then doubtless identified her with his first “Helen”, and poured his heart out in words that died on the autumnal graveyard winds.

Poe spent two more evenings with Mrs. Whitman, his brain reeling “beneath the intoxicating spell” of her presence. But his letter continues: “it was with no mere human senses that I either saw or heard you. It was my soul only that distinguished you there.”⁴ Certainly his passions were no less intense for being platonic!

Poe now returned to *Fordham* and the Poe-Whitman correspondence began.

How genuine were the emotions expressed in the now famous love-letters that passed between these poets? An element of make-believe there undoubtedly is, but people are far less insincere than is generally imagined. But, as has been well said, there are “successive sincerities” and, we might add, simultaneous sincerities. We should therefore bear these successive or multiple sincerities in mind, when we come to the equally impassioned letters Poe now began to address—sometimes on alternate days—to both his Annie and his Helen.

Mrs. Whitman had not yet replied to Poe’s offer of marriage. His overwrought aspect and behaviour at their first meeting seem to have made her pause. Even her first letter to him, after his visit, advances objections to the marriage: she fears, she says, that her delicate health, and her heart-complaint (real or affected?), unfitted her for marriage. She was also some years older than himself. And there are even four further lines of objections crossed out. In any case, Mrs. Whitman would doubtless have been

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman. (Virginia Edition, Vol. 17, pp. 305–306.)*

² *op. cit.* p. 305.

³ Sarah Helen Whitman, *Poe and his Critics.*

⁴ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman. (Virginia Edition, Vol. 17, p. 306.)*

warned of the dangers and difficulties which loving the *Raven* involved. Yet her vanity was flattered, both as woman and poetess, and while she delayed her final decision, she delighted in his impassioned and doubtless "immortal" letters.

Poe, exasperated by so many obstacles in his path, redoubled in ardour and poetic eloquence. To which she replied:

"Although my reverence for your intellect and my admiration for your genius make me feel like a child in your presence, you are not perhaps aware that I am many years older than yourself."

Poe's answer was: "...Do you not feel in your inmost heart of hearts, that the 'Soul love' of which the world speaks so often and so idly is, in this instance, at least, but the veriest—the most absolute of realities? Do you not—I ask it of your reason, *darling*, not less than of your heart—do you not perceive that it is my diviner nature—my spiritual being which burns and pants to commingle with your own? Has the soul age, Helen? Can Immortality regard Time? Can that which began never and shall never end consider a few wretched years of its incarnate life?"¹ As to her fragile health, Helen was far from guessing the immense charm this constituted for Edgar.

Whereupon she wrote: "How often have I heard it said of you, 'He has great intellectual power, but no principle—no moral sense!'"

To which Poe retaliated with a long letter in his defence and soon after paid another visit. On this occasion he recounted his life or, rather, legend. Once again he informed her that, in his mind, she was united with Helen Stanard and that he had known and loved her in an immemorial past. One evening, as she entered the dim fire-lit room, Poe woke with a start, and told her he had seemed to see her portrait on the wall come to life, wearing the features of Robert Stanard, son of his first "*Helen*".

But Poe left Providence with nothing definite settled.

His destination was Lowell, where he was to lecture, after which he returned, with the Richmonds, to their home in nearby Westford. There he remained several days. In the irritable, unstable condition produced in him by Mrs. Whitman, he fled to Annie as to a haven of refuge. The peace and quiet of her home must have seemed paradisaal. There were long walks in the hills, hills which were later to appear, magically transmuted, in *Landor's Cottage*. Sarah, Annie's sister, has left us this glimpse of his visit:

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman. (Virginia Edition, Vol. 17, p. 306.)*

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"My memory photographs him, sitting before an open wood fire, in the early autumn evening, gazing intently into the glowing coal, holding the hand of a dear friend—'Annie'—while for a long time no one spoke, and the only sound was the ticking of the tall old clock in the corner of the room."¹

Here, Poe awaited Mrs. Whitman's reply to his offer of marriage. Finally, about November 2nd, he received her letter but no definite answer. Poe thereupon wrote that he would reach Providence on the 4th and made preparations to leave. He was indescribably agitated, possibly due to Mrs. Whitman's indecision, but mainly by his discovery, during this time, that *he could not live without Annie!* Thus, if Helen consented, he would be separated from his Annie, though it was now impossible for him to withdraw. And if he regained his freedom, his empty cottage, his physical and moral misery would weigh as heavy as before, since Annie, his "sister", was married and could not, alas, follow him to Fordham to comfort and care for him and, in the twilight, hold his hand.

Thus, before he left Westford, Poe wrung from Annie the promise that, wherever he was, she would, at least, come to him when he was dying.

Poe has told us what followed in his own words, in a letter he wrote on November 6th from *Fordham*.

"Oh, Annie, Annie! . . . You saw, you *felt* the agony of grief with which I bade you farewell—you remember my expression of gloom—of a dreadful, horrible foreboding of Ill. Indeed—*indeed* it seemed to me that Death approached me even then, and that I was involved in the shadow which went before him . . . I said to myself—'it is for the last time, until we meet in Heaven'. I remember nothing distinctly from that moment until I found myself in Providence. I went to bed and wept through a long, long, hideous night of Despair—when the day broke, I arose and endeavored to quiet my mind by a rapid walk in the cold, keen air—but all *would* not do—the Demon tormented me still. Finally, I procured two ounces of laudanum, and, without returning to my hotel, took the cars back to Boston" (*i.e.*, towards Annie). "When I arrived, I wrote you a letter in which I opened my whole heart to you—to *you* . . . I told you how my struggles were more than I could bear. . . I then reminded you of that holy promise which was the last I exacted from you in parting—the promise that, under all circumstances, you would come to me on my bed of death.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 780.



EDGAR ALLAN POE
*(from the daguerréotype taken at Providence in 1848 under MacFarlane's persuasion,
after his attempt to poison himself)*

Providence and Lowell: Helen and Annie

I implored you to come *then*, mentioning the place where I should be found in Boston. Having written this letter, I swallowed about half the laudanum, and hurried to the Post Office—intending not to take the rest until I saw you—for, I did not doubt for one moment, that Annie would keep her sacred promise. But I had not calculated on the strength of the laudanum, for, before I reached the Post Office my reason was entirely gone, and the letter was never put in. Let me pass over—my darling *sister*—the awful horrors which succeeded. A friend was at hand, who aided and (if it can be called saving) saved me, but it is only within the last three days that I have been able to remember what occurred in that dreary interval. It appears that, after the laudanum was rejected from the stomach, I became calm, and—to a casual observer, sane—so that I was suffered to go back to Providence. . .”¹

In this state of body and mind and but lately restored from attempted suicide, done in the hope of dying in another woman’s arms, Poe went back to urge his suit with Mrs. Whitman.

After wandering about Providence in a sort of delirium, Poe, oblivious of social conventions, appeared so early at Mrs. Whitman’s home that she could not allow him in. She, however, sent a note to his hotel, proposing a meeting later that day at the Athenæum. Poe replied that he was “*very ill*” and “*must go home if possible*” . . . though, if she said “*Stay*”, he would try to do so. In any case he begged her to write but “*one word* to say she loved him and that, *under all circumstances*”, she would be his.

That night, Mr. MacFarlane, a family friend of the Whitmans, took charge of Poe at the hotel and, next morning, led the “*great poet*” to a photographer. Thus, it is to him we owe the daguerreotype which shows Poe’s worn and ravaged features at this time. From the photographer, Poe went again to Mrs. Whitman’s. To quote her words, he was “*in a state of wild and delirious excitement, calling upon me to save him from some terrible impending doom. The tones of his voice were appalling and rang through the house. Never have I heard anything so awful, awful even to sublimity.*”²

Mrs. Whitman took fright, but her mother, who lived in the house and opposed the marriage, advised her, nevertheless, to see the unhappy

¹ *Poe to ‘Annie’*, Fordham, November 16, 1848. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 312–314.)

² *Israfel*, p. 782.

man. "Moved by his suffering", says Mrs. Whitman, "she urged me to soothe him by promising all that he might require of me".¹ After which her mother spent two hours trying to calm him enough for the conversation to take place. Helen at last appeared and was greeted like a rescuing angel: Poe "clung to her dress so frantically that a piece of the floating muslin drapery was torn away". Thus, in his misery of the eternal orphan, eternally hoping to be fostered again, he clung to the robe of every mother-phantom that entered his life, until that phantom was forced to turn him away.

Mrs. Whitman's mother brought Poe coffee and then sent for a doctor who took him to one of their friends, W. J. Pabodie. A number of meetings followed at the Athenæum, where Mrs. Whitman at last gave her promise, but on condition that thenceforth he would abandon all drink and drugs. Thus, she still retained a way of escape.

With this promise Poe returned to Fordham, but so changed, said Muddy, that she hardly recognised him. Two days later, he was to write Annie the letter we have quoted, describing his suicidal attempt and bemoaning his love for her. That letter ends:

"I am so *ill*—so terribly, hopelessly *ill* in body and mind, that I CANNOT live, unless I can feel your sweet, gentle, loving hand pressed upon my forehead—oh! my *pure, virtuous, generous, beautiful sister* Annie! Is it not POSSIBLE for you to come—if only for one little week? Until I subdue this fearful agitation, which, if continued, will either destroy my life or drive me hopelessly mad."²

Annie, however, came not nor wrote, doubtless alarmed by the frenzy obvious in his letter. Torn between his conflicting emotions, Poe now, in impassioned terms, began to write to each of these women as though indifferent which maternal phantom he supplicated, letters that cried out for the succour and "salvation" which Muddy, with her humble, work-worn hands, could not give him now. For, since the wraith round which he had woven his dreams had departed, a great void filled his cottage at Fordham.

Thus it was that, in these parallel love-letters, Poe, in fancy,

¹ For the details of his account of Poe's last days in Providence, Hervey Allen declares himself indebted to a letter from Mrs. Whitman to Mrs. Mary E. Hewitt, 1850, from which he is not at liberty to quote. *Israfel*, p. 783, note 851.

² *Poe to 'Annie'*. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 314.)

constructed his *Landor's Cottage*, now for Helen and now for Annie, or rather for both, and placed it by a murmuring stream flowing between velvety banks of greensward. There he could fancy himself lulled by a sylphlike, maternal presence whose name was Annie or Helen.¹

To Helen he promised her favourite ambition, the founding, in America, of a "sole unquestionable aristocracy—that of intellect".² For Annie he was going to work with redoubled ardour to win fame and riches for her sake.³ At the same time he wrote to Edward Valentine, his uncle and a minister—the Valentine to whom a frightened boy had once pressed, when passing a graveyard—asking for a loan of \$200 to enable him to begin to print the *Stylus*. Thereby, he would win wealth and fame for Annie and found the American aristocracy of the intellect for Helen.

Valentine does not appear to have sent the money and Annie gave no reply to his letters, which became more frenzied than ever.⁴

What had happened was that "well-meaning" friends had warned Annie's husband of the danger that scandal might arise through Poe's infatuation for his wife. Annie, therefore, ceased answering his letters. Would the loved phantom, yet again, vanish from his life? Then, at least, there would be Helen.

To her he wrote on November 25th:

"In little more than a fortnight, dearest Helen, I shall once more clasp you to my heart . . .",⁵ and goes on to assure her he knows he can keep from drugs and drink: "Henceforward I am strong:—this those who love me shall see—as well as those who have so relentlessly endeavoured to ruin me. It needed only some such trials as I have just undergone, to make me what I was born to be, by making me conscious of my own strength.—But all does not depend, dear Helen, upon my firmness—all depends upon the sincerity of your love."⁶

¹ Cf. *Landor's Cottage*, and letters: *Poe to Annie*, Fordham, November 16, 1848, and *Poe to Mrs. Whitman*, undated. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 312 and 316.)

² *Poe to Mrs. Whitman*, November 22, 1848. (op. cit., p. 318.)

³ *Poe to 'Annie'*, undated. (op. cit., p. 319.)

⁴ *Poe to 'Sarah'* (Annie's sister), November 23, 1848. (op. cit., p. 319.)

⁵ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman*, November 25, 1848. (op. cit., p. 320.)

⁶ *Poe to Mrs. Whitman*. (op. cit., pp. 320–321.)

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Meanwhile, accounts of other "scandals" in Poe's past were beginning to reach Providence. Helen's mother, Mrs. Power, who had never approved of the marriage, took alarm, and Mrs. Whitman was deeply distressed. Despite all, romantically she clung to him. Were they not sister-souls? Was she not his immortal "Helen"? And signal omen, did not their birthdays fall on the same day? Again, to her mind, Poe stemmed from the Le Poers of Norman origin, and did not her father's family, the Powers, descend from the same line? Surely, no gossip, nor even slander, could separate such predestined lovers! Thus, one evening, when the "envious Serpent's" fangs had sunk deep, Helen, at her window, wrote that invocation *To Arcturus*, which speaks so eloquently of desire and trust that her soul's "incandescent fire" shall one day join that symbolic star, however the Serpent seek to divide them. This astral tribute to Poe-Arcturus was to reach him at *Fordham*.

About December 12th, Poe returned to Providence. Events now began to move so swiftly that Poe even prepared a note for Dr. Crooker, the minister, asking him to publish the banns on the next Sunday and Monday. Only the wedding day remained to be settled. Love seemed about to triumph over calumny and family opposition. The only victory Helen's relatives could boast, was the transfer of her property to her mother before she married, that it might be beyond the reach of the "Raven's" beak! The marriage settlement was signed on the 15th and Helen's property passed to her mother.

Poe then returned to *Fordham*, where Muddy, it appears, was deeply hurt to learn that Mrs. Power opposed the marriage, and that it was she who now controlled her daughter's money. Though Muddy had never favoured the match, Poe wrote to Mrs. Whitman that *his* mother, at least, would return good for evil. He also announced that he would reach Providence on Wednesday, the 20th. He did, in fact, leave New York that day, encountering Mrs. Hewitt, who asked, "Mr. Poe, are you going to Providence to be married?"—"I am going", he replied, "to deliver a lecture on Poetry". Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, "That marriage may never take place."¹

The lecture, delivered at the *Franklin Lyceum*, proved highly successful and, next morning, Poe wrote thus to Annie: "I *hope* that I distinguished myself at the Lecture—I *tried* to do so, for your sake. There were 1800 people present, and such applause! I did so much better than I did at Lowell. If *you* had only been there! . . ."²

¹ *Israfel*, p. 789.

² *Poe to 'Annie'*, Thursday morning. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 322.)

It was, doubtless, the same Thursday that Helen at last gave her consent to the wedding and on Friday, the 22nd, a second instrument was signed, in the presence of Pabodie, to complete the transfer of Helen's wealth. Next day, Poe gave Pabodie his note to the minister requesting him to publish the banns. Then he wrote to Mrs. Clemm: "My Own Dear Mother—We shall be married on Monday, and will be at Fordham on Tuesday, in the first train."¹

That morning, Saturday, December 23rd, the two lovers went driving together. Helen then went home to pack and in the afternoon met Poe at the public library. There she was handed a letter containing an account of the "scandal" at Lowell, caused by Poe's passion for Mrs. Richmond. Mrs. Whitman also learnt, perhaps through Pabodie, that Poe had been seen that morning drinking with friends, in the bar of the Earl House hotel. Thus, on the very eve of marriage, he broke the promise on which his marriage depended.

Mrs. Whitman seized the excuse and, as they returned home, told him what she had learnt he had done that morning. We do not know whether she mentioned Annie. Then, in his presence, she countermanded the publishing of the banns. Poe denied emphatically that he had been drinking and we shall never know to what extent he seemed under the influence of liquor. This incident, Mrs. Whitman said, had made her realise how hopeless it was to think of reforming him. Nor was she wrong. My own belief, however, is that the principle reason for her decision was her learning of his love for Annie. Whatever he might have said in denial, had she charged him with it, (ignorant as we are whether she did or no), her intuition would have known the truth. Such a blow to her self-esteem could not but instantly demolish the whole exalted edifice she had built round the man. That is doubtless why Poe's dismissal was so final.

Mrs. Whitman now informed her mother of the situation and, late that afternoon, she sent for Poe to return his letters and papers. These she gave him in the presence of her mother and Mr. Pabodie and then, exhausted, sank back on a sofa and covered her face with a handkerchief moistened with ether. Poe rushed to her side, but was reminded by Mrs. Power that his train would soon leave for New York. Poe then fell on his knees and begged his Helen to revoke her decision. At last she murmured "What can I say?" "Say that you love me, Helen." At this she whispered "I love you", through the handkerchief moistened with ether.²

¹ *Israfel*, p. 789.

² *op. cit.*, p. 790.

These were the last words she spoke to the man whose weeds she was thenceforth to wear for the thirty-odd years (she died at eighty) which her failing health was still to let her enjoy.

Pabodie took Poe to the station. Given his prominence throughout this affair, it may not be irrelevant to note that he, too, had once aspired to Mrs. Whitman's hand.

Baudelaire, in his introduction to the *Histoires extraordinaires*, thus relates Poe's rupture with Mrs. Whitman: "We are told . . . that, one day, when just about to remarry—he turned up appallingly drunk near his intended wife's house to the great scandal of the neighbours. He thus resorted to his vice to avoid betraying the dead love whose image still lived in his soul, the love of which he sang so wonderfully in his poem, *Annabel Lee*."¹

Baudelaire, who based his account on Griswold's² Memoir, seems to have exaggerated Poe's drunkenness here, though it is possible that Mrs. Whitman, in agreement with Pabodie,³ minimised it later in the interests of her cult of her fiancé's memory.

But, as we earlier said, Baudelaire was right in guessing design in Poe's conduct to Mrs. Whitman. Was it fidelity to Virginia, as Baudelaire believed or to Annie, as Poe's conflict seems to indicate? Or, more deeply, was it fidelity to his dead mother on whom his libido was fixated, which permanently cut him off from a normal approach to women? Poe's alcoholism and frenzies which so terrified the woman he loved and, even, his naive faith in his "rival" Pabodie, were all so many means used by his mother-fixation to save him, on the threshold of marriage, from the dangers of physical contact with a living woman.

"Thank Heaven! the crisis—the danger—is past", he sang shortly after in his poem, *For Annie*. These words can also be interpreted in the way we have shown.

¹ "On raconte . . . qu'un jour, au moment de se remarier . . . il alla, épouvantablement ivre, scandaliser le voisinage de celle qui devait être sa femme, ayant ainsi recours à son vice pour se débarrasser d'un parjure envers la pauvre morte dont l'image vivait toujours en lui et qu'il avait admirablement chantée dans son *Annabel Lee*."

² *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe with a Memoir* by Rufus Wilmot Griswold and *Notices of his Life and Genius* by N. P. Willis and J. R. Lowell: Vol. 1; New York, Redfield, 1853.

³ Cf. *Pabodie to the New York Tribune*, *Griswold to Pabodie*, and *Pabodie to Griswold*, 1852. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 408–415.)

Poe returned alone to the *Fordham* cottage to which he had thought to bring his bride. Mrs. Clemm was, if anything, relieved, never having liked the marriage. But Poe's pride, more even than his love, was deeply hurt. Thus, his first care was to try and comfort that pride. He therefore wrote to Mrs. Whitman begging her to do or say nothing that could contradict his version of their rupture: that "our marriage was postponed simply on account of your ill-health".

Almost at the same time he wrote to Annie, declaring that an immense weight had been lifted from his heart by the rupture with Mrs. Whitman, since he had been determined to break off the engagement. . .

How much truth was there in this? A good deal, doubtless. Poe's passion for Mrs. Whitman, with all its vicissitudes, must soon have become a veritable torture to him. And it seems sure, moreover, that his feeling for Annie was the nearest to love he felt at this time.¹ And if he had good reason to conceal his love for Annie from Mrs. Whitman, he might, without overmuch lying have told Annie—had he already mentioned Helen—that she need feel no jealousy of her adorer's feelings as regarded Mrs. Whitman.

Be that as it may, late in January, he sent Annie his next letter to Mrs. Whitman, that she might read it before it was sent on.

"I enclose you a letter for Mrs. Whitman. Read it—show it only to those in whom you have faith, and then *seal* it with wax and mail it from Boston. When her answer comes I will send it to you: that will convince you of the truth." And added: "In all my present anxieties and embarrassments, I still feel in my inmost soul a *divine* joy—a happiness inexpressible—that nothing seems to disturb. . . ."

Such was Poe's state of mind after parting from his "Helen of a thousand dreams!"

Towards the end of the same letter he also wrote: "But of one thing rest assured, 'Annie',—from this day forth I shun the pestilential society of *literary women*. They are a heartless, unnatural, venomous, dishonourable *set*, with no guiding principle but inordinate self-esteem. Mrs. Osgood is the *only* exception I know . . ."²

Also, in the same letter, he detailed the numerous magazines that had recently accepted, or asked for, articles. He is so busy, so full of energy. He must get rich, for to be poor was 'to be a villain.' And success implied, as

¹ I am in full agreement on this point with Hervey Allen, *Israfel*, p. 775.

² *Poe to 'Annie'*, January 23rd, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 328.)

Annie well knew, the launching at last of the *Stylus* that would make him arbiter of American letters. But he also complains that he has had a "most distressing headache for the last two weeks".

On February 14th, 1849, Poe resumed his long-interrupted correspondence with his friend Thomas, and wrote:

"Right glad am I to find you once more in a true position—'in the field of letters.' Depend upon it after all, Thomas, literature is the most noble of professions. In fact, it is about the only one fit for a man. For my own part there is no seducing me from the path. I shall be a *littérateur* at least, all my life; nor would I abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California."¹

Thus the poet, disappointed in external love-objects and in women, turned his libido narcissistically inwards and, for a moment, put himself and his creative faculty first.

Poe's ideal and unattainable love for Annie would seem to have been a propitious influence in this last creative period of his life. Gone were the emotional storms, the conflicts released by the presence of women he loved because of the dangers they, nevertheless, represented. For, from afar, undisturbed by reality, he could freely dream of his Annie and, rapt in thoughts of her, write or rewrite for the loved eyes *The Bells*, *Eldorado*, *Annabel Lee* and *For Annie*.

It will be remembered that the first version of *The Bells* was written at Mrs. Shew's, at her instigation, during a spell of strange apathy in Poe.² The poem then consisted of only two stanzas: one of tinkling "little, silver bells" (wedding bells), the other of "heavy iron bells" (funereal bells), thus bringing love and death into the close association his repetition-compulsion always commanded.

The two stanzas had lain untouched for over a year. Now, in a single day, doubtless on February 6th,³ Poe amplified them into a longish poem of four stanzas. The silver bells become sleigh bells tinkling in an icy starry night: the marriage bells become gold and ring their "molten-golden" notes through the balmy air of night: the third stanza introduces brazen bells, clamouring of fire in the night, and the poem ends with iron bells tolling a death-knell in the night. Thus, all four stanzas are now set

¹ *Poe to Thomas*, February 14th, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 332.)

² Cf. pages 157-8.

³ *Poe to 'Annie'*, Tuesday—8th. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 330.)

at night and the elaboration of the poem, following his natural bent, ends in all-pervading gloom. But for whom do these bells ring; the silver bells as it were, of betrothal; the wedding bells of gold, the warning bells of brass and last, the iron bells of death? Would it not be for his eternally beloved, lost as soon as he had won her? And those fires which the brazen bells sound and which Poe interposed between Hymen and Death, do they not symbolise the menacing mortal fires of physical love which Poe so greatly dreaded? Thus *The Bells* and its last stanza, in which the word *pean* is so often repeated, would appear to repeat in other words and images, the substance of *Lenore* and *A Pean*.

With this renewal of his poetic impulse came also renewed yearning for the dead mother, she who was "poesy" itself to him. Even in the short poem, *Eldorado*, written doubtless at this time and inspired by the California gold-rush, we see the "gallant knight, gaily bedight"—i.e., Poe, throughout his life lured by that same Eldorado—at last realising that it was but the Valley of the Shadow.

But Poe's great and renewed yearning for union with the dead mother appears most forcibly in his two last great poems: *Annabel Lee* and *For Annie*.

We have already dealt at length with *Annabel Lee* when we described the last months of Virginia's existence.¹ Rosalie Poe records hearing Poe read the poem at Fordham in the summer of 1846.² On the other hand, he apparently told Mrs. Weiss that *Annabel Lee* was written long before the death of Virginia. Was its heroine already Annabel Lee, or did she later become so by association with Annie? Be that as it may, the poem was revised and doubtless improved by his sure instinct during the time Annie illumined his life from afar.

This was when he wrote: "I have written a ballad called *Annabel Lee* which I will send you soon."³

But the full unconscious significance of Annie Richmond for Poe appears far more clearly in *For Annie* than in *Annabel Lee*, in which last the child heroine too much resembles Virginia to allow Annie herself to pierce through.

From the day Poe first saw the light, his mother, Elizabeth Arnold, entered his being to rule it through life. On that original figure, his

¹ Cf. pages 125-132.

² Cf. page 125.

³ *Poe to 'Annie'*, undated. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 346.)

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unconscious was later to superimpose Virginia, his wife. So much so, indeed, that for most of the time he could hardly distinguish her from his mother. When Virginia died, his "orphaned" soul went on searching for a mother-figure to which to cling in phantasy and reality, a figure he was never to find in the world of reality. Maladjusted to life, like all in whom the unconquered instinctual forces of the unconscious outweigh the claims of reality, Poe was to remain so throughout his existence. But when Virginia had followed his mother to the grave one woman, at least, was able to inspire him to a great poem, which neither Mrs. Osgood, Mrs. Shew nor Mrs. Whitman had managed to do. This it is which reveals the sweet and gentle Annie's importance to his unconscious.

FOR ANNIE¹

"Thank Heaven! the crisis—
The danger is past,

—cries the poet after his rupture with Helen, but giving the "crisis" an ampler meaning:

"And the lingering illness
Is over at last—
And the fever called 'Living'
Is conquered at last."

After which, weary of existence, the singer chants his splendid death-song:

"Sadly, I know
I am shorn of my strength,
And no muscle I move
As I lie at full length—
But no matter!—I feel
I am better at length.

"And I rest so composedly
Now, in my bed,
That any beholder
Might fancy me dead—
Might start at beholding me,
Thinking me dead.

¹ FOR ANNIE: *Flag of Our Union*, 1849; *Home Journal*, April 28, 1849; Griswold, 1850. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 216.) The text quoted (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, pp. 111-114) is that of 1849 (*Home Journal*).

Providence and Lowell: Helen and Annie

“The moaning and groaning,
The sighing and sobbing,
Are quieted now,
With that horrible throbbing
At heart: ah that horrible,
Horrible throbbing!

“The sickness—the nausea—
The pitiless pain—
Have ceased with the fever
That maddened my brain—
With the fever called ‘Living’
That burned in my brain.

“And Oh! of all tortures
That torture the worse
Has abated—the terrible
Torture of thirst
For the naphthaline river
Of Passion accurst:—
I have drank of a water
That quenches all thirst:—

“Of a water that flows,
With a lullaby sound,
From a spring but a very few
Feet under ground—
From a cavern not very far
Down under ground.

“And ah! let it never
Be foolishly said
That my room it is gloomy
And narrow my bed;
For man never slept
In a different bed—
And, to sleep, you must slumber
In just such a bed.”

Thus does the poet sing of man's second cradle, the tomb, and imagine himself pressed to Mother Earth as to the breast of the mother who quenches all thirst and lulls the infant to sleep. But the human mother is now to appear:

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"My tantalized spirit
Here blandly reposes,
Forgetting, or never
Regretting, its roses—
Its old agitations
Of myrtles and roses:

"For now, while so quietly
Lying, it fancies
A holier odor
About it, of pansies—
A rosemary odor,
Commingled with pansies—
With rue and the beautiful
Puritan pansies."

Thus, a human being is symbolically announced and the roses, symbolic of sex and woman, and the myrtles symbolic of marriage, recede far away. For, heralded by chaste and "Puritan" odours, those of rosemary, rue and pansies, redolent of the tomb, the mother now appears.

"And so it lies happily,
Bathing in many
A dream of the truth
And the beauty of Annie—
Drowned in a bath
Of the tresses of Annie.

"She tenderly kissed me,
She fondly caressed,
And then I fell gently
To sleep on her breast—
Deeply to sleep
From the heaven of her breast.

"When the light was extinguished,
She covered me warm,
And she prayed to the angels
To keep me from harm—
To the queen of the angels
To shield me from harm."

Providence and Lowell: Helen and Annie

Is not this the perfect picture of the replete nursing falling asleep on the mother's breast, its hunger sated and safe in the cradle of her arms? When the child still revels in this paradise, it has no words to express its bliss. Only later does the adult, in whom the child survives, when allotted a poet's soul, find words and images in which to recover that ancient rapture.

On such an image the poem ends and the child sleeps, all inwardly aglow, in the certitude of its mother's love:

“And I lie so composedly,
Now, in my bed,
(Knowing her love)
That you fancy me dead—
And I rest so contentedly,
Now, in my bed,
(With her love at my breast)
That you fancy me dead—
That you shudder to look at me,
Thinking me dead:—

“But my heart it is brighter
Than all of the many
Stars in the sky,
For it sparkles with Annie—
It glows with the light
Of the eyes of my Annie.
With the thought of the light
Of the eyes of my Annie.”

So the poet, in death, imagines himself part of the radiance of those unforgotten eyes which gaze from the miniature of Elizabeth Arnold, eyes which, in dreams, inspired Ligeia and which first drew him in women.¹

Transcendentally, the poem expresses the dream of dying in Annie's arms, a dream already denied him in reality, and to be again denied a few months thence.

The intensity of Poe's mother-transference to Annie clearly emerges from this poem. Apart from Virginia, the main inspirer of all his writing, Annie, leaving aside Mrs. Stanard, was the one woman, of all he loved, who may be said to have inspired him to a major poem.

¹ Cf. page 130: note.

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On March 23rd, Poe sent her the poem, saying: "I think the lines 'For Annie' (those I now send) much the *best* I have ever written; but an author can seldom depend on his own estimate of his own works, so I wish to know what 'Annie' *truly* thinks of them—also your dear sister and Mr. C—."¹

What Annie thought, we shall never know. But we readily agree with Poe, although we ourselves would also include *Annabel Lee*, *Ulalume* and *To Helen*.

Somewhat earlier, on February 19th, Poe had written to her with a heavy heart for, while ten days earlier² he had cherished the idea of abandoning *Fordham* to settle at Westford near the Richmonds with Muddy or, failing that, of staying with them for a week, now he announces he must not come at all. Gossip, it seemed, had again been active and he gleans from her letters that Mr. Richmond credits his calumniators. He has quarrelled with friends who declare Mr. R—everything despicable. Rather than interfere "with the domestic happiness of the only being in the whole world" whom he has "loved at the same time with truth and with purity,"³ he prefers to renounce all thought of living near Annie or even coming for a visit.

Yet how could the world know that Poe's passions were as platonic as tempestuous? Appearances were deceptive, and what onlooker could suspect that his throes were part of the fact that physical love was denied him. Thus, whenever Poe loved with the "soul love" of his poems, the world's "calumny" forced him to retire with his conscience clear, but no idea why he was defeated.

Annie, however, was not to give him up, although continuing distant.

After this intense emotional upheaval, which had lasted for several months and was marked by his pursuit and loss of Mrs. Whitman, his simultaneous and unswerving worship of Annie, and a bout of feverish literary activity which gave birth to many articles and letters and to the last great poems, Poe, as might be expected, succumbed to intense depression. Some time in March, Muddy wrote Annie, "I thought he

¹ *Poe to 'Annie'*, March 23, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 344.)

² *Poe to 'Annie'*, Thursday—8th. (op. cit., p. 331.)

³ *Poe to 'Annie'*, Fordham, February 19, Sunday. (op. cit., p. 337.) This date seems erroneous, and should be either Sunday, February 18th, or Monday, February 19th.

would die several times. God knows I wish we were both in our graves. It would, I am sure, be far better."¹

Soon after, Poe himself wrote as follows:

"*Annie*—You will see by this note that I am nearly, if not quite, well—so be no longer uneasy on my account. I was not so ill as my mother supposed, and she is so anxious about me that she takes alarm often without cause. It is not so much *ill* that I have been as depressed in spirits—I cannot express to you how terribly I have been suffering from gloom . . . You know how cheerfully I wrote to you not long ago—about my prospects—hopes—how I anticipated being soon out of difficulty. Well! all seems to be frustrated—at least for the present." He then enumerates the magazines that have recently failed him. "No doubt, *Annie*, you attribute my 'gloom' to these events—but you would be wrong. It is not in the power of any mere *worldly* considerations, such as these, to depress me . . . No, my sadness is *unaccountable*, and this makes me the more sad. I am full of dark forebodings. Nothing cheers or comforts me. My life seems wasted—the future looks a dreary blank. . . ."²

Thus Poe, always cyclothymic, now oscillated between increasingly violent extremes of exaltation and despair.

But let us examine these "dark forebodings" of which he speaks. Once already, before parting from *Annie* in November, he had felt the same "dreadful, horrible foreboding of ill". And with reason, for he swallowed nearly an ounce of laudanum next day.³ Then, as almost always in such cases, the foreboding of ill from without, was the external projection and thus, dim consciousness, of an unconscious urge to self-destruction. This urge, on one hand, derived from the destructive instincts latent in us all and, on the other, from the erotic instincts with which they are bound and which impelled Poe towards *Annie*, or rather towards the dead mother she re-embodied and for whom, in his distress, there arose a recrudescence of all his old yearning. Similarly, the "dark forebodings" of his last letter were soon to be justified.

It will be objected that if Poe's career, as we shall see, ended so abruptly, it was mainly because of poor health. This, indeed, we would not deny. Given his alcoholic father and contaminated heredity and, doubtless, under-nourished before and after birth, Poe doubtless

¹ *Israfel*, p. 804.

² *Poe to 'Annie'*, undated. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 345–346.)

³ Cf. pages 170–1.

corresponded to what Lauvrière, for instance, following the fashion of his day, called a "higher degenerate". Also, like many males with an alcoholic heredity, Poe, despite his propensity to drink, was physically intolerant of alcohol. In continual conflict between his heredity, and his urge to identify himself with his drunken father and struggles against that urge, Poe was the striking pattern of the cyclothymic dipsomaniac. And, alcohol, even taken intermittently, its effects aggravated by the opium he absorbed betweenwhile, would doubtless undermine his none too resistant organism, produce morbid changes in the liver and kidneys, and lead to vascular lesions which would dangerously strain his weak heart. In any case, both brain and heart were anything but sound. All this would help to shorten his life. But in addition, especially since Virginia's death, something inside, as though with his whole soul, seemed to urge him desperately down the path along which he was being hurried by his impaired health. Faster and faster he seems to rush, and the call of the tomb seems to sound more imperiously than ever in *For Annie*. It is as though the dead mother in his depths, with ever outstretched arms, refused to be denied any longer and was claiming her son at last.

CHAPTER XXII

Philadelphia, Richmond and Baltimore

The Last "Fugues"

POE was still desperately poor and Muddy, now aged, could no longer help to maintain the home by dressmaking and other expedients. Despite the help of their guardian angels, Stella Lewis and Marie Louise Shew, Poe's one hope of emerging from poverty still remained the *Stylus*. The castles in Spain he had built on this scheme! But before he could build them on solid foundations, the necessary capital must be found. And who on earth would provide it?

Late in February,¹ we find him planning a trip to the South to gain subscribers for the *Stylus*. This trip, however, was put off day after day for lack of necessary funds. Nevertheless, he went on writing to Annie of his determination to be rich. Through Helen, he would have been so, but for Annie he wished to become so himself, a distinction which reveals how different were his attitudes to the two women, the latter, in spite of everything, being far more virile. But between conception and achievement there yawned the gulf of Poe's own temperament.

While Poe was in the final throes of his passion for Helen, a young Oquawka citizen, Edward Horton Norton Patterson, inherited a small fortune and a review, the *Oquawka Spectator*, which his father had founded. His first act on coming of age was to write to Poe.

The letter was that of a young, enthusiastic admirer. For years, he said, he had read whatever he could find by Poe in the many periodicals his father received in exchange for his own review. He thus even knew of Poe's great and long-cherished plan to establish his. In a youthful

¹ *Poe to* —, February 29th, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 338.) Hervey Allen says that this letter and those quoted in the following pages, were written to Eveleth. (*Israfel*, p. 804.)

outburst of enthusiasm and ambition, Patterson now proposed they should start the review together. He would provide the funds and Poe would be editor and main contributor.

Patterson's letter, dated December 18th, 1848, did not reach Poe until April. It was a Spring of great poverty for Poe and the letter must have seemed a godsend. His reply was prompt: he preferred a more ambitious and expensive production than Patterson proposed and wanted the annual subscription to be \$5 instead of the \$3 he suggested. Nor did he like the title Patterson offered though, all in all, he was anxious to reach agreement. The *Stylus*, his life's dream seemed, at last, on the verge of becoming reality.

The correspondence continued. Poe would meet Patterson at Oquawka, Saint Louis, New York or anywhere else; he was about to leave on his tour of the South; he was sure—so he wrote—that he could guarantee, in three months (or four) to get a thousand “subs” in advance through his lecture tour, and by interesting personal friends and West Point acquaintances. To Eveleth he wrote that the first issue might possibly appear in January (1850).¹

In May, Poe journeyed north again, gossip having subsided in Lowell. Thus, he could venture to revisit his Annie. These few days, the last he was to spend in her home were, doubtless, the last happy days in his life. There is no doubt that Annie loved him, too, in her way, as is shown by her letters to Mrs. Clemm after his death.² She was his last haven of refuge.

Poe then returned to *Fordham* with the final version of *The Bells*, made at Westford, to prepare for his journey to Richmond to win wealth. Meanwhile, he was so desperately pressed for money, that he was obliged to write to Richmond to ask that the advance of \$50 he had requested Patterson to send there, be redirected to New York. Thus he was forced to delay his departure. So too, in 1843, a Mr. Clarke had financed an ill-fated journey to Washington for the same object. Was the new effort to be more fortunate? In any case, Poe wrote to Eveleth late in June:

“I am awaiting the *best opportunity* for its issue; and if by waiting until the day of judgment I perceive still increasing chances of ultimate success, why until the day of judgment I will patiently wait. I am now

¹ *Poe to* — (Eveleth). New York, June 26, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 361.)

² *op. cit.*, pp. 398, 402, 431.

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going to Richmond—to 'see about it'—and *possibly* I may get out the first number next January."¹

It is almost as though John Allan's ancient curse that his foster-son would never "amount to anything" continued to weigh on Poe to bar him from riches, or from the material success that remained the prerogative of the 'fathers' and John Allans. This "delayed obedience" to the dread father was, it seems, to make Poe fail, to the end of his life, whenever in reach of success.

Late in June the cottage was closed and again, deeply depressed and full of forebodings, Poe left with Muddy for New York. There, during his absence, she would stay with the kind "Stella", Mrs. Lewis. So dark were his presentiments that, before departing for Richmond, he wrote asking Griswold, in the event of his death, to undertake the editing of his collected works. Willis was appointed to write his biography.

Poe then said good-bye to his New York friends. Mrs. Oakes Smith he met as she was about to leave for the station in her carriage. She was struck by "his look of pain, his unearthly eyes, his weird look of desolation" as he stood, deeply disappointed, in the sun, and murmured: "I had so much . . . so very much, I wished to say".²

To Mrs. Lewis, where he and Muddy passed the night, as they took leave at the door in presence of the weeping Muddy, he said: "Dear Stella, my much-beloved friend. You truly understand and appreciate me—I have a presentiment that I shall never see you again . . . If I never return, write my life. You can and will do me justice."³

Then, with Muddy, he left for the pier. There, kissing her for the last time, he said, "God bless you, my own darling mother. Do not fear for Eddy! See how good I will be while I am away from you, and will come back to love and comfort you."⁴

Poe's route to Richmond lay through Philadelphia, where on July 1st, 1849, the Perth Amboy train doubtless set him down towards evening. With him, in his flowered carpet-bag were two lectures, one of which, *The Poetic Principle*, was his favourite subject at this time. His money amounted to some \$40.

¹ *Poe to* — (Eveleth). New York, June 26, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 361.)

² *Israfel*, p. 813.

³ *op. cit.*, p. 814.

⁴ *ibid.*

As a result of the then recent California gold rush, Philadelphia numbered many taverns, and there was thus plenty of opportunity for him to seek refreshment after his long, hot ride. But what mainly made him succumb was, doubtless, his intense depression which so imperiously called for solace in drink.

What next happened we do not quite know. But one hot July day, John Sartain, the engraver, with whom Poe had occasionally drunk absinthe in older days, while in the offices of *Sartain's Magazine*, which he owned, saw a trembling, dishevelled creature enter, who begged and implored protection from imagined enemies at his heels. Thus, Poe's persecutory ideas, strengthening with age, now manifested themselves in this delirious attack. Sartain, his old friend, took Poe home. There, Poe demanded a razor—which was naturally refused—in order to shave his moustache and disguise himself from his persecutors. The raving poet was eventually persuaded to go to bed and Sartain, fearing to leave him alone, sat up with him all night, Poe himself pleading with him to stay and protect him.

Next day, Sartain's friendship was again severely tested, for

“without cessation Poe poured forth, in the rich, musical tones for which he was distinguished, the fevered imageries of his brilliant but over-excited imagination. The all-absorbing theme which still retained possession of his mind, was a fearful conspiracy which threatened his destruction. Vainly his friend endeavored to reassure and persuade him. He rushed on with unwearied steps, threading different streets, his companion striving to lead him homeward, but still in vain.”¹

During this frenzied chase, Poe led Sartain to the Fairmount Reservoir, which they reached about midnight. There, he made his friend climb the steep flight of steps to the top and, still raving and hinting at suicide, insisted “on the imminence of peril”, and pleaded “touchingly for protection”. Eventually, he allowed himself to be led home. But Sartain's troubles were not over, for Poe managed to elude his vigilance, and spent the night in a neighbour's field. There, as he was falling asleep, some guardian-angel robed in white appeared to him, “to dissuade him from a frightful purpose”.

A few days later, completely beside himself, Poe was arrested for

¹ From William Fearing Gill, *The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* (pp. 233-237) [cf. page 5, note], referred to by Hervey Allen (*Israfel*, p. 816) and Harrison (*Virginia Edition*, Vol .1, pp. 307-308.)

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drunkenness and taken to Moyamensing Prison. There, on the prison ramparts, another white-robed phantom woman appeared and spoke to him in whispers: "If I had not heard what she said", Poe declared, "it would have been the end of me".¹

Thus, twice during this dark time, the Dead Woman deep in his soul, by reason of his delirium tremens, was able to issue from her living tomb and, externally "projected", became visible to him in whom she dwelt. Both threatening and protective, she condensed his distant and recent past; namely, Elizabeth Arnold and Virginia who, even in life, had done no more than re-embody the dead mother. Now both women had fused into the one shrouded figure from the Beyond which had come to claim the son who overlong tarried.

Next morning, Poe, it seems, was recognised at roll-call, when someone exclaimed, "Why, this is Poe, the poet!" and he was released without the penalty of the usual fine. When asked by Sartain why he had been put in prison, his answer was that he had forged a cheque. Doubtless obsessions of English's old charge had emerged in this acute persecutory attack. To add to his woes, he suffered severely from diarrhoea, which he himself called "cholera".

As might be expected, the dead mother continued the core of these delirious fancies, and he was obsessed by thoughts that Muddy was dead. In his hallucinations he already saw her dead, and implored Sartain to get him laudanum—the very drug which once before had failed him in the same purpose—in order, doubtless, to rejoin in the Beyond that one and only protean Mother. When Sartain refused, he again escaped to wander anew through the streets. There, he was met by two old friends, Chester Chauncey Burr and the eccentric *Monk's Hall* George Lippard, who took him in charge and saw he had every care. Soon, his attack subsiding, Poe was able, on July 7th, to write to Muddy a letter which entirely reveals the content of his delirious attack.

"My Dear, Dear Mother,—I have been so ill—have had the cholera, or spasms quite as bad, and can now hardly hold the pen.

*"The very instant you get this, come to me. The joy of seeing you will almost compensate for my sorrows. We can but die together. It is of no use to reason with me now; I must die. I have no desire to live since I have done *Eureka*. I could accomplish nothing more. For your sake it would be sweet to live, but we must die together. You have*

¹ *Israfel*, p. 817.

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been all—all to me, darling ever beloved mother, and dearest truest friend.

"I was never really insane except upon occasions when my heart was touched.

"I have been taken to prison once since I came here for getting drunk; but then I was not. It was about Virginia."¹

This, without doubt, alludes to the white apparition.

Thus Poe's loving phantasy of reunion in death with the loved mother—the phantasy which, after so many other works, inspired *Annabel Lee* and *For Annie*—now wove itself no longer round Virginia's dying grace or the tranquil charm of Annie, but round the grey hair and widow's bonnet of the ever-faithful Muddy. That, at least, was some reward for the humble, devoted creature who had returned to Fordham, greatly offended, because a rich friend had suggested she give up her "son". Now, sick with anxiety, she waited for news of him.

We can imagine Poe, with the tearful effusiveness of the alcoholic, penning these vehement apostrophes to death and the "Mother", in the delirious hand he refers to in a later letter. And it was doubtless because he already imagined himself one with his Muddy in death, that he erroneously headed his letter New York, where he had last left her.

Graham, learning through Lippard of the plight of his former editor, sent him \$5, and Peterson, his one-time associate, did the same, while Burr paid his passage to Baltimore. The flowered carpet-bag, lost for ten days, was recovered, but no longer containing the two lectures. Armed with his thus lightened bag and the \$10 from Peterson and Graham, he was seen off by Burr at the pier on Friday, July 13th.

At Baltimore, Poe changed to the steamer for Richmond where, just before entering harbour, he wrote as follows to Muddy, in terms pathetically eloquent of his yearning for the Mother she embodied:

"Near Richmond

"The weather is awfully hot, and besides all this, I am so homesick I don't know what to do. I never wanted to see anyone half so bad as I want to see my own darling mother. It seems to me that I would make any sacrifice to hold you by the hand once more, and get you to cheer me up for I am terribly depressed. I do not think that any circumstances will ever tempt me to leave you again. When I am with

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Clemm.* (Woodberry, 1909, II, pp. 311-312; *Israfel* p. 817.)

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you I can bear anything, but when I am away from you I am too miserable to live."¹

Poe reached Richmond in the evening of July 14th and immediately went to *Duncan Lodge*, where he was welcomed by the always hospitable Mackenzies. He was greatly dishevelled and his clothing in a pitiable state. That same evening he sent a new hearts-cry to Muddy:

... "I got here with two dollars over—of which I enclose you one. Oh God, my Mother, shall we ever meet again? If possible, oh *COME!* My clothes are so horrible and I am so ill. Oh, if you could come to me, my mother, Write instantly—Oh do not fail. God forever bless you. Eddy."²

This dollar was all Poe sent her throughout his Richmond stay.

Thus, despite the love and care of the Mackenzies and Rosalie, his sister, Poe continued to yearn for Muddy—"My mother"—like the small child he had become through delirium and illness.

A few days later, we find Poe settled at the *Old Swan Tavern*, a modest hostelry in which he had taken a room. There he was visited by Dr. George Rawlings who tells us that Poe was still, at times, violent and once even threatened him with a pistol. But his attack was subsiding and he soon wrote in answer to Mrs. Clemm's letter:

"Richmond, Thursday, July 19.

"*My Own Beloved Mother*—You will see at once by the handwriting of this letter, that I am better—much better—in health and spirits. Oh! if you only knew how your dear letter comforted me! It acted like magic. Most of my sufferings arose from the terrible idea that I could not get rid of—the idea that you were dead. For more than ten days I was totally deranged, although I was not drinking one drop; and during this interval I imagined the most horrible calamities.

"All was hallucination, arising from an attack which I had never before experienced— an attack of *mania-à-potu*. May heaven grant that it prove a warning to me for the rest of my days . . .

"All is not lost yet, and 'the darkest hour is just before daylight'.

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Clemm*, July 14th, 1849, first letter. (Woodberry, 1909, II, pp. 313-314, and *Israfel*, p. 818.)

² *Poe to Mrs. Clemm*, July 14th, 1849, second letter. (Woodberry, 1909, II, p. 315. *Israfel*, p. 819, erroneously dates this letter September.)

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Keep up courage, my own beloved mother—all may yet go well. I will put forth all my energies . . .”¹

We thus see Poe confessing his most serious attack of *delirium tremens* which, in all, had lasted almost two weeks. But it was over and, for the last time, hope stirred in his breast.

* * *

Mr. Shelton had made a fortune in trade and, dying, left Elmira with a son and a life-interest in his estate. She was now approaching forty and had developed into an imposing, self-possessed and pious woman.

Soon after reaching Richmond, Poe went to call and was ushered into the parlour, while the man-servant went to announce the gentleman below. It being Sunday, Elmira was dressing for church and, as she entered, he rose and cried out eagerly: “Oh, Elmira, is it really you?” Mrs. Shelton, though amazed to see him, knew him at once. As she was going to church, and “never let anything interfere with that”, she told him “he must call again . . .”

He did: old times were recalled and he reminded her of her promise twenty-four years earlier. At first she thought that, in his romantic way, it was a jest, but soon realised he was very serious. Thus, towards the end of July, though not engaged, “a partial understanding” had been reached between them

If Poe thus returned to his Elmira, it was because she was once his young sweetheart, and because that youthful rapture still glowed in a heart such as his. But there was also another factor for, meanwhile, his boyhood Elmira had become one of those opulent mother-figures of which children dream, who shed abundance on all around. It was not her money itself which drew him, as has been charged, but Elmira’s money, like Helen Whitman’s, was an attribute of the Mother’s omnipotence and fertility. So, once, the rich Frances Allan had reigned in his mind, when she adopted the small orphan and lavishly showered her blessings on him. Thus Poe, eternal foundling, though near forty, was driven by the old repetition-compulsion which governs our lives to try once more to get himself adopted, this time by the Elmira who had charmed, then blighted, his adolescence.

As for Mrs. Shelton, this renewed courtship could not but flatter her self-esteem. She had never forgiven her parents for intercepting Edgar’s

¹ Woodberry, II, pp. 315–316; *Israfel*, p. 820.



SARAH ELMIRA SHELTON
née ROYSTER
(from a daguerreotype)

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letters, that she might marry the unromantic Mr. Shelton. Now, after twenty-four years, she learnt that Edgar had never forgotten her. Elmira was a woman, however pious. And even her piety would incline her vanity and heart to make her wish to save his "lost soul". Poe, who for years had avoided church, except when led there by Mrs. Shew, was soon observed in Mrs. Shelton's pew on Sundays.

With time, Richmond's worthies had come to forgive Poe his behaviour to John Allan, and fame had made him an object of interest. Children who saw him pass were to recall it later: "A poetical figure, if ever there was one, clad in black as was the fashion then—slender—erect—the subtle lines of his face fixed in meditation . . . I thought him wonderfully handsome, the mouth being the only weak point."¹ Drawing-rooms were thrown open to him again, and he was even received by Mrs. Julia Mayo Cabell, a relative of the second Mrs. Allan. Rumours of Edgar's understanding with Mrs. Shelton also helped to increase the consideration now accorded him.

Poe's time was mainly spent with Rosalie and the Mackenzies at *Duncan Lodge*, with the Talleys at *Talavera*, and with Mrs. Shelton at *Church Hill*, on the further side of town. He went on foot and would often stop half-way to rest in the office of his new young doctor-friend, John Carter, who lived on *Broad Street*.

This tardy betrothal was not, however, to continue unclouded. Elmira was familiar with Poe's ill-repute as well as his glory, and did not especially relish the idea of financing the *Stylus*, much as Poe would have liked to rid himself of Patterson. Now, in his letters to the latter, Poe complacently advances "cholera", "calomel" and "congestion of the brain", as delaying his replies, and postponing his proceeding with the *Stylus*.²

Meanwhile, Elmira was busy safeguarding her money before their marriage. If Poe's pride had been hurt by Mrs. Power's concern to protect Helen Whitman's money, it was far more wounding for him to observe that Elmira was protecting her own; a lack of confidence which roused his ire. Even by August, a coolness had arisen between these erstwhile lovers. Elmira requested the return of her letters, and Edgar avoided Elmira.

¹ *Israfel*, p. 822. From Basil C. Gildersleeve, in Harrison's *Biography*. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, pp. 315-316.)

² *Poe to Patterson*, Richmond, July 19 and August 7, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 363.)

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On August 7th, Poe delivered his lecture on *The Poetic Principle* to an invited audience and was received with great applause. Mrs. Shelton was present, but Edgar left with the Talleys.

The proceeds of this lecture, together with the small sums received for his contributions to the *Southern Literary Messenger*, enabled him, for the time being, to carry on. But to buy a new suit was beyond him or to send help to Muddy who, destitute and alone, awaited him vainly at *Fordham*.

Elmira had had reason to have her doubts of Poe, for now he had two further delirious attacks similar to those in Philadelphia, probably caused by the abundant Southern hospitality and rich wines. On the first occasion, he was cared for by the Mackenzies in his room at the *Old Swan Tavern* and recovered fairly soon, but the second, in August, was far more severe. Poe had to be moved to *Duncan Lodge* where his young friend, Dr. Carter, attended him.

When he recovered consciousness, Carter, as earnestly as he knew how, warned him that another such attack would undoubtedly prove fatal and that, if he wished to live, he must utterly abstain from drink. Poe, torn by remorse, sobbed bitterly, bemoaned his fate and recounted his strivings to free himself from his "vice". He vowed he would control himself in future and never again yield. Soon after, to strengthen his resolution, he joined the *Shockoe Hill Division* of *The Sons of Temperance* and took the pledge before the president, W. J. Glenn; an event reported in the Press.

For the rest of his stay in Richmond, Poe seems to have kept the pledge. We find him often in the offices of the *Richmond Examiner* with Daniel, the Daniel whom, a year earlier, he had challenged to a duel, but with whom he was now fast friends. There, faithful as ever to his muse, Poe revised certain poems, including *The Raven* and *Dreamland*, saw them through the press, and corrected his proofs.

Early in September, we find Edgar back in Elmira's graces and officially engaged. On September 5th¹ he wrote to Muddy:

... "And now, my own precious Muddy, the very moment I get a definite answer about everything I will write again and tell you what to do. Elmira talks about visiting Fordham—but I do not know whether that would do. I think, perhaps, it would be best for you to give up everything there and come on here in the Packet. Write immediately and

¹ According to *Israfel*, p. 832, the letter here quoted (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 368–370) dated (September, 1849) must have been written in the evening of Wednesday, September 5th.

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give me your advice about it—for you know best." Then, without transition, "Could we be happier in Richmond or Lowell?—for I suppose we could never be happy at Fordham—and, Muddy, I *must* be somewhere where I can see Annie . . ." And later: "I think, upon the whole, dear Muddy, it will be better for you to say that I am ill, or something of that kind, and break up at Fordham so that you may come on here. . . You know we could easily pay off what we owe at Fordham and the place is a beautiful one—but I want to live *near Annie*."

Then, in closing, he adds:

"Do not tell me anything about Annie—I cannot bear to hear it now—unless you can tell me that Mr. R. is dead.—I have got the wedding ring.—and shall have no difficulty, I think, in getting a dress-coat."

This letter gives us three important items of information: first, that Edgar and Elmira have decided to marry; second, that he has not yet decided to journey to Fordham for Muddy; third, that the main emotional effect of his engagement to Elmira was to reactivate his yearning for Annie.

On the verge of linking his life with another, what explodes is regret that she is not Annie. For though Elmira had been his youthful flame, there would be little of his slender, mischievous schoolgirl to rekindle his poet's imagination in the pious, matronly forty-ish woman he now knew. Not by chance, therefore, is his reference to Mr. R—'s death followed by the statement that he has got the wedding ring. Such a juxtaposition, in the unconscious, implies a connection of ideas. It is as though Poe said: "Why is not Annie a widow and free? Then, I should place that ring on her hand!"

Yet, it was also largely because Annie was *not* a widow and not *free* that Poe loved her so dearly. For while Elmira, in his eyes, had acquired the new disadvantage, in addition to her others, of becoming accessible, Annie continued to fulfil one of his prime conditions of love, as he had sung it at twenty:

"I could not love except where Death
Was mingling his with Beauty's breath—
Or Hymen, Time, and Destiny
Were stalking between her and me."

Now, between him and that very Elmira who had, in part, inspired this poem, neither the old Hymen nor Destiny stalked! Thus, Edgar wrote in a letter to Muddy: "Elmira has just got home from the country.

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. . . I think she loves me more devotedly than anyone I ever knew and I cannot help loving her in return . . ."¹ This is hardly the note of passion and we saw how differently he could write about Annie.

It was between these poles, Elmira and Annie—each a symbol invested with deep, unconscious significance—that his destiny was to swing in these last months of his life.

On the one hand was the widow nearing forty, soon to become his wife, with whom he must face an act he had apparently never attempted and who, prosaic and pious though she was, nevertheless stood for the dangers inherent in the sex act. On the other, was one he loved from afar, wedded and barely thirty, with whom there was no such "danger" and round whom he could freely weave his dreams, especially that last, most glorious dream, of dying in her arms.

One was the woman with whom he would have to struggle and live prosaically and "dangerously". The other, the woman with whom he could dwell in a world of poetry and dreams, and imagine himself lulled to eternal sleep, as though on a mother's breast.

But the woman who dominated his fate, was always, undoubtedly his mother, Annie being her 'transference' now Virginia was dead. Mrs. Shelton, by her wealth, the safety and protection she offered, would thus represent the bountiful Frances Allan. Annie then, on whose bosom he longed to die, whose starry eyes set his heart glowing, would then unconsciously represent—because of mysterious affinities we cannot, at this stage, identify, but in which eyes would play a great part—his first love-object and mother, Elizabeth. Had he not, with all his being, wished to follow her, when cruel men bore her away and would not let him cling to her cold bosom? The yearning for that joy which they had reft away, was to accompany him all through existence.

One day when Poe was in the office of the *Examiner*, he was visited by a Mr. St. Leon Loud, the husband of a Philadelphia poetess, who offered him \$100 to edit his wife's poems. Poe accepted, as usual needing money, and mentioned the matter to Muddy in his letter of September 5th, part of which we have already given. The work, he wrote, would barely occupy three days. He also invites her to join him in Richmond. But writing again on September 18th, he says he means to fetch her himself—not in Fordham, where "it will be better for me not to go—don't you

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Clemm*, Richmond, Tuesday—Sep. 18,—49. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 366.)

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think so?"—but in New York. He will leave in a week, stopping *en route* in Philadelphia to edit Mrs. Loud's poems and earn his fee. Meanwhile, he still has no money to send her.

Thus, within thirteen days, Poe changed his plans radically to enable him, on the eve of marriage, to travel northward to Muddy, in the direction of Annie. Once before, when almost engaged to Helen Whitman, a similar "fugue" had driven him north from Providence to Boston—and towards Annie—with two ounces of laudanum in his pocket. Now, though he had no laudanum, his psychic predisposition, in his menaced physical condition, was likely to be as deadly as the drug.

Poe's melancholy, or rather his sudden fits of gloom, struck all who saw him in these last weeks at Richmond. Socially, and as a writer, he had been a success; his lectures at Richmond and Norfolk on his favourite theme, *The Poetic Principle*, were a triumph; he was about to marry one of the most prominent Richmond women and his old friends were glad to welcome him again. Yet, even at the liveliest parties, even at gatherings where he was honoured guest, he would suddenly sink into profoundest melancholy from apparently whole-hearted animation. His face clouded and he would seat himself alone, or stroll in the garden to talk of the past with some friend. More than ever, at this time, that past seems to have haunted him. Mrs. Weiss, then Miss Talley, has related the pilgrimage they made together to the "*Hermitage*", the Mayo's old home, where Poe played as a child, and his unutterable melancholy while walking through the neglected gardens and empty house. Miss Ingram, again, tells how, one day at Norfolk, walking with Poe, he noticed the orris-root scent of her clothes, and observed how it always reminded him of childhood and his foster-mother,¹ for that was the smell of her linen cupboards.

On Saturday, September 22nd, Poe spent the evening with Elmira. Their marriage was fixed for October 17th. His present was a large cameo, set as a brooch. He seemed happy, for Elmira had just promised to write to Muddy, which she did when he left. Though they had never met, she said in her letter, she nevertheless felt she was writing to one whom she already loved. She praised Edgar as "sober, temperate, moral and much beloved", and piously added: "I trust a kind Providence will protect him, and guide him in the way of truth, so that his feet slip not". Closing she said: "It has struck 12 o'clock, and I am encroaching on the Sabbath, and will therefore conclude. Good night, Dear Friend, may

¹ Cf. *Israfel*, pp. 831 and 835.

Heaven bless you and shield you, and may your remaining days on earth be peaceful and happy . . .

"Thus prays your attached tho' unknown friend

Elmira."¹

Alas! Muddy's "happy" days were ended, and futile were Elmira's hopes and prayers that Edgar would not slip.

On September 24th, to a packed hall, Poe for the last time lectured in Richmond, his subject again *The Poetic Principle*. This lecture, his many friends had arranged, in order to provide him with funds for the journey north.

Poe spent the next afternoon at *Talavera* with the Talleys. He spoke of his future with eager delight, and Miss Talley relates that never had she seen him so cheerful or full of hope. He was the last to leave, and declared that the last few weeks in Richmond had been his happiest for many years. He also expressed great regret in being compelled to go to New York for even so brief an absence. As they said farewell on the portico, a brilliant meteor appeared directly over his head. It inspired a laughing comment, but she was to remember it sadly later.

Poe then returned to *Duncan Lodge* for the night, once more depressed and, it is said, full of dire forebodings. He seemed disinclined to talk and sat late at his window, pensively smoking. Next morning he saw his trunk packed, that trunk which John Allan, in 1829 had, at last, sent on to Baltimore after Edgar left home.

Wednesday, September 26th, his last day in Richmond, was spent bidding farewell to friends. He also called at the *Messenger* office, whose editor, Thompson, had lent him \$5. As he was leaving, Poe turned to Thompson and said: "By the way, you have been very kind to me—here is a little trifle that may be worth something to you", and handed him a MS copy of *Annabel Lee*. That afternoon, also, Rosalie visited Susan Talley with a gift, from her brother, of a copy of *For Annie*. Such were the bequests at his disposal. The same afternoon, he also visited *Church Hill* to take leave of Mrs. Shelton. He seemed to her very sad, and complained he felt ill. She took his pulse and found him feverish: he seemed in no fit state to start next morning. Her own account, as given by Lauvrière,² is that Poe, when leaving, said he must visit New York on business and

¹ *Elmira to Mrs. Clemm*, Richmond, September 22nd, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 396-397.)

² Lauvrière, Emile: *Edgar Poe, Sa vie et son œuvre*, p. 292. *Appleton's Journal* XIX, p. 421.



ROSALIE POE
1810-1874

*(from a photograph in the possession of the Mackenzie family,
reproduced by J. H. Whitty)*

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would return when it was done. But he also said that something told him he would never see her again.

After seeing Elmira, Poe looked in at Dr. Carter's office. There he spent an hour scanning the day's papers and, when he left, took his friend's cane for his own. He then crossed the street to dine at Sadler's and there lingered with friends. Two of the party, Blakey and Sadler, tell us that, that evening, the "Son of Temperance" kept his pledge. Eventually, Poe was accompanied to the pier by some of the party, and went on board the steamer which left at four next morning.

Why, in fact, did Poe undertake this journey north? We are variously told that his purpose was to shut the cottage at *Fordham*, to bring Muddy to Richmond, to discuss his collected works with Griswold and to edit Mrs. St. Loud's poems in Philadelphia for the promised \$100.

Actually, however, there was nothing in all this that made his presence indispensable. All these reasons were but rationalisations of an unconscious, deeper urge. For Muddy could well have shut the *Fordham* cottage alone and we saw him, on September 5th, proposing she take the Richmond packet. Possibly, she may then have written to ask him to fetch her, but it seems to me that he himself had decided on this trip. In their relation, it was he who generally needed help and, even when Muddy lacked food, as late in August, it was to Griswold and Mrs. Lewis that she turned, and not to Eddy.

Nor was there any particular hurry about his collected works, and he himself had told Muddy that Christmas would do for Mrs. Loud's poems.¹ Thus, the proceeds of his lecture, which paid for his journey north, might just as well have kept him in Richmond until his marriage took place on October 17th, after which his money troubles would have been ended.

"If possible", he wrote to Muddy on September 18th, "I will get married before I start—but there is no telling."² Yet, it was inevitably before his marriage that Edgar was driven to go north by the compulsions inherent in his being. This *negative* psychic tropism, which made him rid himself of every woman as soon as the sex-act came in sight, was to be as determinant in the man of forty towards Mrs. Shelton, as towards Mary Devereaux when he was twenty-three. The reader will recall that, after

¹ *Poe to Mrs. Clemm*, (September, 1849) Wednesday evening. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 369.)

² *op. cit.*, p. 367.

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courting her for months Poe, one evening, arrived so intoxicated that she was forced to break with him for good. Elmira was spared the pangs of a similar scene, but Edgar's way of ridding himself of her was still more drastic. Nor must we forget the *positive* tropism which drew him to Annie, or rather to the woman who, in Annie, had found her last shrine.

We do not know exactly when Poe broke his pledge. Was it at Sadler's, in spite of Sadler's and Blakey's testimony, or on the steamer, where he spent forty-eight hours and where there would surely have been a bar? Or possibly later in some Baltimore hotel? At any rate, the dipsomaniac's irresistible urge, deaf to all vows and finding plentiful justification, must have assailed him somewhere on the way. At such times, the menace of death or downfall little matter. And for Poe, the death concealed in the glass could only be an extra unconscious allurements.

Thus, on Saturday, September 29th, the very day he reached Baltimore, a drunken Poe called on his friend, Dr. Nathan C. Brooks, after which, for five days, all trace of him disappeared.

Various conjectures have been made regarding Poe's movements during this time. The most convincing is as follows. Political corruption was then rife and no voters' lists existed. Thus, political gangs, before elections, would round up people in the streets and hold them, well supplied with liquor, until the day they could be led to the polls. Such temporary quarters were called "coops". As a congressional election would be held in Baltimore on October 3rd, the round-up of potential voters began some five days earlier. It is likely that Poe was thus seized with others and cooped up, plentifully supplied with liquor, pending the day of the polls.¹

In one such Whig "coop", known as "Ryan's Fourth Ward Polls", 130 or 140 voters are said thus to have been held in 1849. This coop adjoined *Cooth and Sergeant's Tavern*, which doubtless did excellent business at such times.

On Wednesday, October 3rd, Dr. Snodgrass, an old friend of Poe's, who lived nearby, was handed this pencil-scrawled note:

"Baltimore City, 3rd, 1849.

"Dear Sir,—There is a gentleman, rather the worse for wear, at Ryan's 4th Ward Polls, who goes under the cognomen of Edgar A. Poe,

¹ *Israfil*, pp. 842 ff. after Woodberry and Harrison.

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and who appears in great distress, and he says he is acquainted with you, and I assure you he is in need of immediate assistance.

Yours in haste,

To Dr. J. E. Snodgrass.

Jos. W. Walker."¹

Dr. Snodgrass recognised the hand. It was that of a slight acquaintance and compositor on the *Baltimore Sun*. He thereupon hurried to the place indicated, through the chill October rain, and found Poe at *Cooth and Sergeant's Tavern*.

America's greatest poet was sitting huddled in his chair, surrounded by low ruffians,

"his face . . . haggard, not to say bloated, and unwashed, his hair unkempt, and his whole physique repulsive. His expansive forehead . . . and those full-orbed and mellow, yet soulful eyes for which he was so noticeable when himself, now lusterless as shortly I could see, were shaded from view by a rusty, almost brimless, tattered and ribbonless palm leaf hat. His clothing consisted of a sack-coat of thin and sleezy black alpaca, ripped more or less at intervals of its seams, and faded and soiled, and pants of a steel-mixed pattern of cassinett, half-worn and badly fitting, if they could be said to fit at all. He wore neither vest nor neck cloth, while the bosom of his shirt was both crumpled and badly soiled . . ."²

While Dr. Snodgrass was busy getting a room ready at the inn, Poe's cousin, Mr. Herring arrived, in some way informed of the news. Both then decided to move Poe to *The Washington Hospital*. A carriage was sent for and, unconscious and still clutching Dr. Carter's cane Poe, at 5 p.m., was left in charge of the duty-physician, Dr. J. J. Moran.

Dr. Moran's account of what passed we take from the letter he soon after wrote to Mrs. Clemm:

"When brought to the hospital, he was unconscious of his condition—who brought him or with whom he had been associating. He remained in this condition from five o'clock in the afternoon—the hour of his admission—until three next morning. This was on the 3rd October.

"To this state succeeded tremor of the limbs, and at first a busy but not violent or active delirium—constant talking—and vacant converse with spectral and imaginary objects on the walls. His face was pale and

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 843–844.

² l.c., p. 844, quoting E. Snodgrass, *The Facts of Poe's Death and Burial* (*Beadie's Monthly*, 1867, pp. 283–288.)

his whole person drenched in perspiration. We were unable to induce tranquillity before the second day after his admission.

"Having left orders with his nurses to that effect, I was summoned to his bedside so soon as consciousness supervened, and questioned him in reference to his family, place of residence, relatives, etc. But his answers were incoherent and unsatisfactory. He told me, however, he had a wife in Richmond (which I have since learned was not the fact), that he did not know when he left that city, or what had become of his trunk of clothing. Wishing to rally and sustain his now fast sinking hopes, I told him I hoped that in a few days he would be able to enjoy the society of his friends here, and I would be most happy to contribute in every possible way to his ease and comfort. At this he broke out with much energy, and said the best thing his best friend could do would be to blow out his brains with a pistol—that when he beheld his degradation, he was ready to sink into the earth, etc. Shortly after giving expression to these words, Mr. Poe seemed to doze, and I left him for a short time. When I returned I found him in a violent delirium, resisting the efforts of two nurses to keep him in bed. This state continued until Saturday evening (he was admitted on Wednesday), when he commenced calling for one 'Reynolds', which he did throughout the night until *three* on Sunday morning. At this time a very decided change began to affect him. Having become enfeebled from exertion, he became quiet, and seemed to rest for a short time; then gently moving his head, he said, '*Lord help my poor soul*' and expired."¹

Such was the final attack of *delirium tremens* which ended Poe's life at forty.

On Monday, October 8th, after certain leading citizens had visited

¹ *Dr. Moran to Mrs. Clemm*, from the Baltimore City Marine Hospital, November 15th, 1849. (*Biography, Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 335.) In the concluding line of Dr. Moran's letter and in the highly moral expressions of remorse which he attributes to the poet, may be detected the germs of the edifying legend which was to grow up regarding Poe's last hours. During his long life, Dr. Moran repeatedly lectured on the poet whose deathbed he attended, and gradually embellished the story in a manner wholly inconsistent with medical accuracy. Dr. Moran's picture of Poe's last hours finally came to be of the most sentimental and edifying nature. He ended by asserting that while in his hands, Poe was in full possession of his faculties for fifteen of the sixteen hours; that when first found he was not in an intoxicated condition—that no odour of alcohol, even, could be detected about his person; that his dying thoughts were all of God and the salvation of his soul. We see here the force of social censure operating on a mediocre mind to the extent of completely altering its view of the truth. (Cf. in this connection *Israfel*, pp. 895-896, in particular the letter of February 27th, 1882, there quoted from Dr. Moran to Edward Abbott.)

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his mortal remains, Poe, though Episcopalian was, at his cousin's expense, buried in the Presbyterian Church Cemetery. The burial service was read by the Rev. W. T. D. Clemm, a Methodist pastor. Those present included Neilson Poe, Mr. Herring, Dr. Snodgrass, a certain Edmund Smith and Z. Collins Lee, one of Poe's college friends.

Neither Muddy, with whom he had wished to die, nor Annie who had promised to be with him on his death-bed, wherever that might be, were present. Only by the newspapers, did those who loved him get news of his death. Muddy's first cry of anguish went to Annie:

"Annie, my Eddy is *dead*. He died in Baltimore yesterday. Annie! pray for me, your desolate friend. My senses *will leave me*. I will write the moment I hear the particulars. I have written to Baltimore. Write and advise me what to do.

Your distracted friend,
M.C."¹

And Annie, in a letter incoherent with grief, wrote:

"Oh my mother, my darling, darling mother oh, what shall I say to you—how can I comfort you—oh mother it seems more than I can bear—and when I think of you, his mother, who has lost her all, I feel that it must not, no, it cannot be—oh if I could but see you, do, I implore you, come to Annie soon as possible—come, dear mother, and I will indeed be a daughter to you—oh if I could only have laid down my life for his, that he might have been spared to you."²

But Annie had not been able to keep her promise that he should "fall asleep" on her breast, as in his poem: she who, for a year, had so ideally re-embodied his young, ever-mourned mother. Companioned through life by phantoms, he was forced to content himself with phantoms in his last hours. The figures he saw on the walls and with whom, in his delirium, he held converse, were his Ligeias, his Virginias: always the one and same mother through every avatar. And when, on the last night of all, he called so strangely for Reynolds—as it seemed to those about him—was not this as dying men call on the mother. For had not Reynolds, like

¹ *Mrs. Clemm to 'Annie'*, Oct. 8, 1849. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 338.)

² *'Annie' to Mrs. Clemm*, Oct. 1849, Wednesday morning. (op. cit., Vol. 17, p. 398.) First Annie, and then Stella, made a home for Mrs. Clemm after Poe's death. She died at the Baltimore Church Home and Infirmary, over eighty, on February 16th, 1871.

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Arthur Gordon Pym, striven to conquer the South Pole, that white symbol of the frozen-in-death Mother? Embarking thus on his final adventure, Poe now identified himself with one of the conquerors of the Polar seas before sinking, forever, into the abyss to merge again, as it were, with the Mother who gave him birth.

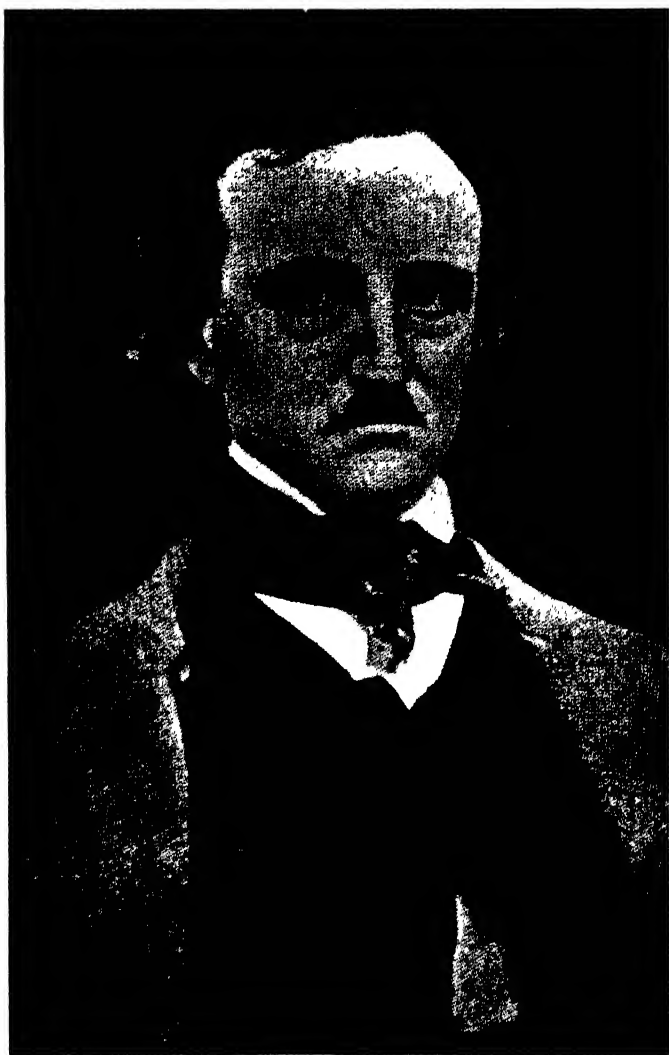
Faithful as ever, he returned, never having known—it seems almost certain—the carnal embrace of a woman. The “danger”, the “crisis”, were over at last, now that the “fever called Living” was past.

And the Son was reclaimed by the Mother.

BOOK II

THE TALES

Tales of the Mother



EDGAR ALLAN POE
1848
(from the *Whitman daguerreotype*)

The Tales

WE are now ready to begin the study of Poe's *Tales*. Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creator's psychology and, as Freud has shown, their construction resembles that of our dreams. The same mechanisms which, in dreams or nightmares, govern the manner in which our strongest, though most carefully concealed desires are elaborated, desires which often are the most repugnant to consciousness, also govern the elaboration of the work of art. Like our dreams, wish-phantasies in works of art, to their creators, as to the public, represent a sort of safety-valve for the repressed instincts. Had Poe not possessed the literary genius which enabled him to sublimate his dangerous impulses in art, he might, conceivably, have spent part of his life in prison or the madhouse.

* * *

We shall not follow the chronological order of Poe's tales in the present study, for the manner in which our repressed instincts break through the unconscious, to give birth to dreams or works of art, wholly ignores temporal relations. We are therefore justified in grouping our author's works according to their unconscious dominant theme, a theme reactivated, for one reason or another, by external circumstances. From each of these groups, dominated by one theme, we shall choose the most typical of Poe's tales by which to illustrate his inner existence.

* * *

Baudelaire has observed that love, as such, plays no part in Poe's tales. "Mrs. Frances Osgood's idea of Poe's chivalrous respect for women," he writes, "is corroborated by the fact that, in spite of his phenomenal skill in portraying the grotesque and horrible, there is never in his work one passage that might be called licentious, nor one that deals with sensuous pleasures. All his women, as it were, are drawn wearing haloes; they shine through a supernatural aura, and are strikingly delineated as

Tales of the Mother

though by an adorer.”¹ An adorer, we might add, who dare not approach the object of his adoration, since he feels it surrounded by some fearful, dangerous mystery.

We shall turn our attention first to Poe's tales in which this feminine type, with its aura of the supernatural, is predominant.²

¹ “Dans les nouvelles de Poë il n'y a jamais d'amour.”—Ce qui corrobore l'idée de Mme. Frances Osgood relativement au respect chevaleresque de Poë pour les femmes, c'est que, malgré son prodigieux talent pour le grotesque et l'horrible, il n'y a pas dans tout son œuvre un seul passage qui ait trait à la lubricité ou même aux jouissances sensuelles. Ses portraits de femmes sont, pour ainsi dire, auréolés; ils brillent au sein d'une vapeur surnaturelle et sont peints à la manière emphatique d'un adorateur.” *Edgar Poë, sa vie et ses œuvres*, preface to Baudelaire's translation of Poe's tales entitled, *Histoires extraordinaires*.

² The excerpts from Poe's tales which I shall quote are all taken from *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, edited by James A. Harrison, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell and Co., 1902, 17 vol. This work is referred to throughout as the *Virginia Edition*.

Tales of
The Live-in-Death Mother

CHAPTER XXIII

Berenice¹

AFTER his stormy departure from West Point in March 1831, Poe found himself readopted, this time by his aunt, Mrs. Clemm. He thus once more found himself in contact with his little cousin Virginia, not yet nine at the time. We know how important a place Virginia was destined to fill in his affections, his life and work, and how successfully she came to reincarnate, in the poet's unconscious, both his baby sister and the fragile, poetic, dying mother who was to remain the one great love of his life. We shall not, therefore, be surprised to find that Virginia served as the unwitting Muse, who first called Poe's genius as a writer of imaginative prose to life, in what we know as *The Tales of the Folio Club*, to which the gruesome story, *Berenice*, belongs.

Egæus, heir to the ancient castle of his fathers, scion of a feudal race—a race of visionaries—unites in his person the conflicting symptoms of various mental disorders. First, he describes his schizoid tendencies:

“The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn,—not the material of my every-day existence—but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself.”

He then speaks of his tendency to obsessional rumination, which he thus distinguishes from the ponderings of the average day-dreamer:

“In my case the primary object” (of his musings) “was *invariably frivolous*, although assuming, through the medium of my distempered vision, a refracted and unreal importance. Few deductions, if any, were made; and those few pertinaciously returning in upon the original

¹ *Berenice*: *Southern Literary Messenger*, March 1835, 1840: Broadway Journal, I, 14.

Tales of the Mother

object as a centre. The meditations were *never* pleasurable; and, at the termination of the reverie, the first cause, so far from being out of sight, had attained that supernaturally exaggerated interest which was the prevailing feature of the disease."

As to the third mental disorder with which Egæus is afflicted—and which enables him to accomplish the fearful deed that brings the tale to a close—this will become evident later.

Egæus, who doubtless reproduces in compact and exaggerated form several psycho-neurotic traits of his creator, even to his opium-taking,¹ also resembles Poe in having a girl cousin. When the tale begins, this girl is well, as Virginia herself must then have been.

"Ah! vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy!"

Yet another and most ancient image, that of the mother, beloved ever more as her strength failed, made it impossible for any of his heroines to remain well long! A few lines further and we find that:

... "all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease—fell like the simoom upon her frame, and, even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person!"

Thus the little cousin, Berenice or Virginia, gradually loses her identity and is amalgamated with the beloved mother of the past who, likewise, succumbed to what must have seemed to the child Edgar a vague and equally incomprehensible disease. For Poe, it was inevitable that this change must take place, Love being equated for him with Beauty touched by Death. And Egæus himself confesses as much when he says:

"During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. . . And *now*—now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach; yet bitterly lamenting her fallen and desolate condition, I called to mind that she had loved me long, and, in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage".

As the period of their nuptials approaches, we find Egæus, one mild winter afternoon, in his castle library.

"The recollections of my earliest years are connected with that chamber," he has already told us, and "Here died my mother. Herein was

¹ The reference to opium was suppressed by Poe in a later edition.

Berenice

I born." In that chamber also, as in Egæus-Edgar's mind, there hovers "a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow . . .".

Thus, with a poet's prescience, Poe informs us that unconscious memory exists. But what in essence are these unconscious memories that haunted him? "There is," writes Edgar-Egæus,

"a remembrance of ærial forms—of spiritual and meaning eyes—of sounds, musical yet sad . . ."

How subtly this evokes the sylphlike Elizabeth Arnold, the ailing singer and actress. And this "remembrance which will not be excluded" is

"like a shadow, too, in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist".

Small wonder then that, one day, as Egæus, now the betrothed of Berenice, sits meditative and absorbed in this haunted library where his mother died, the shadow should take form in the same way as it was to re-embody itself in Edgar's cousin Virginia, by entering her as that family disease to which they were all prone; the same disease which, under the same roof, was carrying off his brother Henry. The miracle—dreaded yet desired—takes place. Suddenly, as Egæus fancies himself alone with his books, Berenice is there before him. "Perhaps she had grown taller since her malady."¹ Elizabeth Arnold, Poe's frail and sylphlike mother, need not have been taller than the little Virginia, her niece, to appear tall in her son's memory. Who has not had the experience of finding that objects and places, remembered from infancy, appear strangely shrunk when seen as an adult? Our measure of our surroundings is proportionate to our size. Besides, those who dominate us, as adults dominate the child, are magnified in the mind's eye. Thus, most people have attributed superhuman or gigantic stature to their gods and goddesses, who are but the human parents infinitely enlarged.

Egæus gazes long at the emaciated figure of the apparition and then his "burning glances" fall on her face.

"The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets now of a vivid yellow, and jarring

¹ This sentence is omitted from Poe's last versions of the tale. (See *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, p. 314.)

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discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lustreless, and seemingly pupil-less, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view."

This portrait combines features from two different models. The lofty, pale, and singularly placid forehead would seem to have been Virginia's (see her portrait, page 140), although Elizabeth Arnold's brow, under the jet-black hair which "overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets", might answer to the same description (see portrait of Elizabeth Arnold, page 6). The change in the colour of the hair from black to yellow, as a result of her disease—a phenomenon unknown to clinical observation—is, however, more difficult to explain. This puzzled me for some time but, one day, reading Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, I was struck by the singular appearance of Life-in-Death—the fantastic passenger who is seen with Death, on the phantom ship, by the Ancient Mariner—for the hair of Life-in-Death is the same startling yellow.¹ Poe's admiration of Coleridge, which dated from his early youth, is well known. We cannot escape the conclusion that, influenced by Coleridge, this yellow hair had become a symbol of Life-in-Death to him: "the Nightmare . . . who thickens man's blood with cold".

In two other works, the poems *Eulalie* and *Lenore*, Poe's heroines have yellow hair, like Berenice. In *Eulalie* there is no tragic note and misfortune is only mentioned as being adjured *not* to appear. But in *Lenore*, we see the colour of her hair as she lies on her bier:

"The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes—
The life still there, upon her hair—the death upon her eyes".²

This would seem to confirm our theory that "yellow" hair had, indeed, come to symbolise for Poe the Life-in-Death with which each of his heroines was endowed and, deep in his unconscious, first and foremost his own mother.

In the first version of *Berenice*, the heroine had "golden" hair, turned

¹ "Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thickens man's blood with cold."

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part III.)

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 7, p. 54.

Berenice

by her illness into "ringlets now black as the raven's wing",¹ which at first sight, might seem to weaken our argument. But we shall see later that fair (not specifically "yellow") hair, is a symbol, with Poe, for infidelity to the *dark-haired* mother who, in the first version of *Berenice*, reappears as the fair cousin; much in the way that the dark-haired Ligeia is re-embodied in the fair Rowena. The fact that Poe inverts the sequence of events in the last version of this tale, by changing Berenice's "golden" hair in her prime to "yellow" hair as she lies dying, shows how powerfully Coleridge's symbol of Life-in-Death dominated Poe's unconscious.

If now, in Poe's description of the "new" Berenice, we turn to the eyes, they are clearly those of a corpse, modelled doubtless on the fixed and glassy eyes which Poe, as a child, would have seen as those of his dead mother. This would also seem to be true of the teeth and Poe's obsession with *teeth*, which now develops in Egæus, was doubtless born at his mother's bedside. The consumptive's drawn and emaciated lips would have revealed her teeth, (the teeth we encounter in so many of Poe's tales), and the description that follows of Berenice in her coffin, would seem to corroborate this opinion.

For, after Egæus has spent a night, a day and another night in his library, haunted by visions of Berenice's teeth, a great cry is heard and a messenger appears to announce her death. He then sees her again in her coffin. One of her fingers seems to move, the bandage about her jaws breaks asunder and her teeth, exposed, seem to grin hideously at him.

Poe, himself, judged it better to suppress this episode in the last version of the story. Possibly it reproduced a memory all too real.

But now another form of mental disease takes possession of the hero; an epileptoid attack, followed, as is generally the case, by amnesia. Doubtless, this improbable transformation of an obsessional schizoid into an epileptic, with subsequent amnesia, to some extent symbolizes the infantile amnesia that masked the unconscious sources from which Poe drew this frightful tale. In any case, the hero, yielding to a sudden impulse, visits the grave, disinters Berenice's body and, utilising instruments that belong to the family physician, extracts all her thirty-two teeth. Berenice, however, proves not to be dead, but "live-in-death", *i.e.*, in a state of catalepsy and, during this brutal act, comes to herself, screaming wildly. Help comes, but too late. Egæus, back once more in the fatal library, is found by a servant with his garments muddy and clotted with gore. His fearful crime is revealed as Berenice's teeth fall from their box and are scattered on the floor. On this, the tale ends,

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, p. 314.

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It will appear to some of our readers that, whatever psycho-analysis may say, the sexual factor plays no part in this tale. What more obvious than that Poe, when a child of three, saw his dearly loved mother die; that this fearful image was thus graven on his unconscious; and that thus, throughout life, it tended to reappear in his writings? True, the reader will continue, these narratives are sometimes extremely terrifying, but therein lies the narrator's peculiar gift.

Such an over-simplified explanation, however, cannot explain Poe's *predilection* for tales of solely this type and, in effect, such a predilection can only be explained by adducing a sexual factor. If Poe so frequently and with such satisfaction reproduces the illness, death and burial (usually the premature burial) of his mother, it was because nascent erotic factors had irredeemably crystallised round her at a moment when, so to speak, she was adorned with these appanages of sickness and death, even though it was a death which—as in childhood and the unconscious—seems non-existent and only a parting to be followed by a return.

From an analytic point of view, *Berenice* shows us yet more. As we have already seen, Poe's sexual impotence was conditioned by a fixation on the mother and on a mother who was dying and later, a corpse; thus implying a moral upheaval in Poe against all sexuality, since sexuality could only mean to him both sadistic destruction and necrophilia. And the danger of sexuality, the punishment that threatens all who yield, is shown, as in *Berenice*, by the manner in which Egæus is obsessed by her teeth. And indeed, in psycho-analysis, many cases of male-impotence reveal, though more or less buried in the unconscious—strange as it may seem to many a reader—the notion of the female vagina being furnished with teeth, and thus a source of danger in being able to bite and castrate. That Poe's unconscious, too, held this phantasy, is testified by many of his tales. Mouth and vagina are equated in the unconscious and, when Egæus yields to the morbid impulse to draw Berenice's teeth, he yields both to the yearning for the mother's organ and to be revenged upon it, since the dangers that hedge it about make him sexually avoid all women as too menacing. His act is therefore a sort of retributive castration inflicted on the mother whom he loves, and yet hates, because obdurate to his sex-love for her in infancy. We shall meet the same theme again in *The Black Cat*.

This concept of the *vagina dentata* and its consequent menace is, however, also a displacement (in this case downwards) of a factor with roots deep in infantile experience. We know that babes which, while toothless, are content to suck the breast, no sooner cut their first teeth

than they use them to bite the same breast. This, in each of us, is the first manifestation of the aggressive instinct, as many a mother can testify. Abraham, in his fine study of the evolution of human libido,¹ splits the first of the most important stages through which the libido passes, namely the oral phase, into two parts: before and after the cutting of the child's teeth. The second of these he terms the *cannibal* phase. If, in fact, the child were not restrained, it might really try to eat, as well as suck, the breast on which it feeds. But, by gentle taps when it bites too hard, or by being deprived of the breast and, later, when the sense of what "one should not do" has been instilled by ever severer and more numerous moral injunctions (education in cleanliness being the first great step), the memory, or rather the phantasy of biting the mother's breast must become charged, in the unconscious, with past feelings of wickedness. And the child, having learnt by experience what is meant by the law of retaliation when he infringes the code—codes so deeply ingrained in our unconscious race memories—begins, in his turn, to fear that the bites he wished to give his mother will be visited on him: namely, retaliation for his "cannibalism".²

The child knows, therefore, from experience, that the wish to bite and devour flesh, even that of his fellows, is a profound biological instinct. He attributes it to others, and with reason. Are there not tribes to-day, in Australia, which devour their children at a kind of family banquet?³ The father would seem to have preserved this ghastly appetite even later into human history than the mother. It was Kronos from whom the mother of Zeus hid her son, to save him from his father's gluttony. But in ancient times, too, the mother must sometimes have been guilty of devouring her offspring as, nowadays, does in our domestic hutches. Traces of this barbarous age still survive in our myths, legends and fairy tales, in the persons of ogres and ogresses. The teeth of *Berenice* are thus the fellows—though "vaginalized" or "genitalized" in the unconscious—of the ogress who eats the children in Perrault's version of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

¹ Abraham, K: *A Short Study of the Development of the Libido in Selected Papers of Karl Abraham, M.D.*, London, Institute of Psychoanalysis and Hogarth Press, 1927. Translated from *Versuch einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Libido* (Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1924).

² I owe this interesting and just observation, which links the apparently fantastic concept of the *vagina dentata* with actual experience, to a remark made by Freud.

³ Reported by Dr. Géza Róheim, on his return from Australia, 1931. (Cf. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Róheim Australasian Research Number, London, January-April 1932; Vol. XIII, Parts 1 and 2.)

CHAPTER XXIV

Morella¹

LIKE *Berenice*, *Morella* forms part of *The Tales of the Folio Club*.

The nameless hero of this story meets a girl named Morella. From the moment they meet, his soul "burned with fires it had never before known". But, says the hero,

"the fires were not of Eros, and bitter and tormenting to my spirit was the gradual conviction that I could in no manner define their unusual meaning, or regulate their vague intensity".

They marry, but—confesses the husband—"I never spoke of passion, nor thought of love".

Morella, the other partner in this strange marriage, is profoundly erudite: "her powers of mind were gigantic". And, indeed, so great is the fascination she exerts over her husband that, despite himself, he becomes her pupil in the philosophical and mystic studies in which she is adept. But soon a mysterious malady preys, too, on Morella. She begins to pine and her terror-struck husband grows to regard her with increasing aversion. The nature of her disease is clearer to us than was that of *Berenice*.

"In time, the crimson spot settled steadily upon the cheek, and the blue veins upon the pale forehead became prominent."

Like Elizabeth Arnold, she is wasting with consumption. And now a morbid eagerness seizes her husband for her death, that seems so slow in coming.

One autumn evening, however, she finally expires, after making the sybilline prophecy: "I am dying, yet I shall live". She then adds:

"her whom in life thou didst abhor, in death thou shalt adore . . . thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on the earth. . .".

Then, dying, she gives birth to a daughter.

¹ *Morella*: *Southern Literary Messenger*, April, 1835; *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, November, 1839; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, I, 25.

Morella

The child grows in wisdom and stature with disturbing rapidity. At ten, she is already a grown woman, the physical counterpart of her mother, with her mother's smile and eyes; yet, though her father loves her fervently, it is with a love that is soon mingled with fear.

"In the contour of the high forehead, and in the ringlets of the silken hair, and in the wan fingers which buried themselves therein, and in the sad musical tones of her speech, and above all . . . in the phrases and expressions of the dead on the lips of the loved and the living, I found food for consuming thought and horror—for a worm that *would* not die."

For "two lustra" the father watches the child grow under his care, yet never in that time has he named her anything but "my love", or "my child".

But now a mysterious urge takes him to have the child baptised, though even at the font he is unable to decide on a name. Then, however, moved by some unreasoning impulse he suddenly, in the priest's ear, murmurs the name of she who is dead: *Morella*. In that instant the child is convulsed, turns pale and, falling lifeless on the black slabs of the family vault, says, "*I am here!*"

When the father, with his own hands, places his child in the tomb, he finds no trace of the first *Morella*.

Such, in substance, is this tale. No clearer description of what is known in psycho-analysis as *transference* could be imagined. *Transference* comes about by feelings properly attached to one being, being displaced upon another. Thus, throughout our lives, we all *transfer* our emotions—or, as the psycho-analyst would say, our *libidinal cathexes*—to various objects, insofar as they represent prototypes established, in earliest infancy, by our parents and educators and first loves and hates. All our later loves and hates are but *transferences* from these.

Similarly, the husband and father of both *Morellas* *transfers* his love from one to the other. It is not difficult to see that the hero is again Poe and that he has here described, under the thinnest of disguises, his own emotional conflict at this time.

Virginia, when Poe was writing *Morella*, was in fact about ten, the age of the second *Morella*. And it was just at Virginia's age that *Morella* is baptized with her dead mother's name, whose stature she has reached. Transparent symbols of a real event; for Virginia was about ten when she was elevated by Poe—the stepping-stone being doubtless memories

Tales of the Mother

of his sister Rosalie—to the dignity of a *mother-transference* figure.

Such a transference, however, though essentially proof of intense attachment, inevitably involves a certain betrayal of the original object. A doom, therefore, decreed by the dead mother, must thenceforth cloud the destiny of the father who too fondly loved his child. As the first Morella predicted, he must remain faithful to the dead, despite himself and his new love: "Thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on the earth", words which might equally have been spoken by Elizabeth Arnold to the little son whom, by her fate, she doomed to eternal mourning. "The hours of thy happiness are over; and joy is not gathered twice in a life." But what "joy" had the father, in fact, known with his wife? He had not loved her with a husband's love—which of Poe's heroes, always a reflection of Poe, was so to do?—but had been spellbound by her "gigantic intellect". Thus the bonds which once united the tiny boy to his mother are recalled, as also his dependence on her for instruction in the forbidden, "accursed" lore—doubtless sexual knowledge—of which she held the key. Due, however, to the original incest prohibition, which imposed a sex barrier between mother and child, the boy's first resentment is later visited on the wife, with the result that his "joy" fades "into horror". Thus, Poe's ungratified libido, to which normal channels of satisfaction were denied, became changed into the morbid anxiety to which these *Tales* bear witness: tales in which, in fact, "the most beautiful" became "the most hideous".

Nevertheless, the loss of Morella, for the second time, in the person of the beloved daughter, is more than a mere punishment inflicted on him by the dead mother, for this *dénouement* affords the hero the sombre gratification of once more beholding the corpse on which his love was fixated. Here we find expressed that "repetition-compulsion", which dominates our instinctual life, and impels us always to seek the same emotions in the same forms, whatever the object. Since love, from infancy, for Poe, had worn death's aspect, it was an erotic necessity for him that, in her turn, the second Morella should die, as did the little Virginia some few years later, in the same manner as Elizabeth Arnold.

* * *

Before I continue this gruesome survey of Poe's heroines, I must crave the reader's indulgence for the monotony of my theme. Time and again we find the same manifest situation, that of some ideal woman

Morella

who sickens and dies, yet does not really die, since she lives on in unearthly radiance, putrescent and ethereal at one and the same time. Always and forever it is the same latent theme: that of Elizabeth Arnold's last agony and death—repeated in after years, in the little Virginia's agony and death. Very little else will be found in the next five or six tales and the reader may possibly find their analysis tedious.

And yet, I am unable to spare him. For the very monotony of these tales, their endless repetition, are themselves expressions of Poe's psyche. Since such situations forced themselves on him, we ourselves have no right to ignore them as, at times, I have been tempted to do, or to omit from this analysis one or other of these typical tales, in which the living-dead mother appears and vanishes. For, better perhaps than any single example, the monotonous repetition of the same theme, as of its expression, enables us to feel how crushingly Poe's soul, his life and work, were dominated by the compulsion to repetition.

CHAPTER XXV

Ligeia¹

LIGEIA, another transference story, of all Poe's tales, was that which he liked best.² And justly so, if we consider the subtlety with which it builds upon the complex that formed the nucleus of his psyche.

Ligeia, the heroine, is as remarkable for her beauty as for her character, intelligence and learning. The hero is somewhat vague as to where they first met:

... "I believe that I met her first and most frequently in some large, old, decaying city near the Rhine."

The tale is set in Europe and against that sombre, mediæval background made familiar to us in *Morella*, *Berenice* and again in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. This décor is doubtless a reminiscence of Poe's childhood sojourn in England, when he roamed in ancient parks amid venerable trees, or breathed a bygone air under Gothic arches.

Actually, however, our hero hardly knows in what old city of Europe he first met Ligeia. He ignores even the family name or, as he says, the "paternal name" of this unique, superior woman,

"who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom".

Her origin and birthplace alike remain a secret to him. All he knows is that she appears and thenceforth reigns over his life.

"There is one dear topic, however, on which my memory fails me not. It is the *person* of Ligeia."

¹ *Ligeia*: *The American Museum*, September, 1838; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 12.

² "... 'Ligeia,' which is undoubtedly the best story I have written—" Poe to Duyckinck, Jan. 8, 1846. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 227.)

Ligeia

And here, carefully following his description, we shall see whether or no our suspicions are confirmed.

"In stature she was tall, somewhat slender, and, in her latter days, *even emaciated*.¹ I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, the quiet ease, of her demeanor, or the *incomprehensible lightness*¹ and elasticity of her footfall. She came and departed as a shadow."

Thus, once more, the graceful dancer is evoked, the slender consumptive that was Elizabeth Arnold. But the hero continues:

"I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder".

And thus, again, we find the deep voice, the marble hand of Morella, perhaps drawn from the same model. The reader will also recall the icy hand which rested on Edgar's face during the nightmare-haunted nights of his adolescence.²

"In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her. It was the radiance of an opium-dream—an airy and spirit-lifting vision . . ."

And here we would beg the reader to turn to the portrait of Elizabeth Arnold,³ and compare it with the description that follows, making due allowance, however, for the inevitable idealization.

"Yet her features were not of that regular mould which we have been falsely taught to worship in the classical labors of the heathen. 'There is no exquisite beauty,' says Bacon, Lord Verulam, speaking truly of all the forms and *genera* of beauty, 'without some *strangeness* in the proportion.' Yet, although I saw that the features of Ligeia were not of a classic regularity—although I perceived that her loveliness was indeed 'exquisite', and felt that there was much of 'strangeness' pervading it, yet I have tried in vain to detect the irregularity and to trace home my own perception of 'the strange'. I examined the contour of the lofty and pale forehead—it was faultless—how cold indeed that word when applied to a majesty so divine!—the skin rivalling the purest ivory, the commanding extent and repose, the *gentle prominence of the regions above the temples*;¹ and then the raven-black, the glossy, the luxuriant and *naturally-curling tresses*,¹ setting forth the full force of the Homeric epithet, 'hyacinthine!' I looked

¹ Author's italics.

² Cf. page 22.

³ Cf. page 6.

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at the delicate outlines of the nose—and nowhere but in the graceful *medallions*¹ of the Hebrews had I beheld a similar perfection. There were the same luxurious smoothness of surface, the same scarcely perceptible tendency to the aquiline, the same harmoniously curved nostrils speaking the free spirit. I regarded the sweet mouth. Here was indeed the triumph of all things heavenly—the magnificent turn of the short upper lip—the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under—the dimples which sported, and the colour which spoke—the teeth glancing back, with a brilliancy almost startling, every ray of the holy light which fell upon them in her serene and placid, yet most exultingly radiant of all smiles. I scrutinized the formation of the chin—and here, too, I found the *gentleness of breadth*,¹ the softness and the majesty, the fullness and the spirituality, of the Greek—the contour which the god Apollo revealed but in a dream, to Cleomenes, the son of the Athenian. And then I peered into the *large eyes*¹ of Ligeia.”

I have italicized the portions of this description which conform most obviously to the medallion that depicts Elizabeth Arnold. It is significant that the very word “medallion” has slipped into Poe’s description of Ligeia, the said medallion being the only portrait of his mother he possessed.

And now, after the “gentle prominence of the regions above the temples”, the naturally-curling black hair and the “gentleness of breadth” of the chin, Poe passes to Ligeia’s “large eyes” in a description[†] which, if possible, is still more characteristic and reminiscent of the portrait.

“For eyes we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in these eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. Yet it was only at intervals—in moments of intense excitement—that this peculiarity became more than slightly noticeable in Ligeia. And at such moments was her beauty—in my heated fancy thus it appeared perhaps—the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and, far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, *slightly irregular in outline*,¹ had the same tint. The ‘strangeness’, however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from the formation, or the color, or the brilliancy of

¹ Author’s italics.

Ligeia

the features, and must, after all, be referred to the *expression*. Ah, word of no meaning! behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we intrench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. The expression of the eyes of Ligeia! How for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it! What was it—that something more profound than the well of Democritus—which lay far within the pupils of my beloved? What *was* it? I was possessed with a passion to discover. Those eyes! those large, those shining, those divine orbs! they became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers.”

In this ardent and exalted vein, Poe, unknown to himself, thus described his mother's eyes, for ever vivid in his unconscious. We know, from Poe himself, that Ligeia was conceived after a dream in which he saw nothing but eyes—eyes that fascinated him by their strange expression.¹ Thus the mother whom he had lost in infancy, continued to haunt the depths of his being.

But so deeply were these eyes buried in the amnesia of infancy, that their identity remained a mystery to Edgar. Nevertheless, there came at times a vague sense that they represented a real memory, for Ligeia's lover thus continues:

“There is no point, among the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of mind, more thrillingly exciting than the fact—never, I believe, noticed in the schools—that, in our endeavors to recall a memory something long forgotten, we often find ourselves *upon the very verge* of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember. And thus how frequently, in my intense scrutiny of Ligeia's eyes, have I felt approaching the full knowledge of their expression—felt it approaching—yet not quite be mine—and so at length entirely depart!”

Poe, however, was mistaken in supposing that he desired a “full knowledge of the expression” of those eyes. What he really wished to recover was his knowledge of their *identity*; that of her to whom they had belonged. The psychic emphasis has been displaced from recognition of an *identity* to recognition of an *expression* of the eyes, in obedience to the mechanism of *displacement*, characteristic of the neurotic return of repressed material. For moral inhibitions, in fact, prohibited Poe from recovering the memory of his infantile incestuous wishes towards his mother, with their sado-necrophilist implications. Hence it was that the so frequently sought-for

¹ Cf. page 130.

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memory escaped him, even as he stood "*upon the very verge of remembrance*".

The *displacement* phenomena continue, destined to lead the seeker ever further from his real object:

"And (strange, oh strangest mystery of all!) I found, in the commonest objects of the universe, a circle of analogies to that expression I mean to say that, subsequently to the period when Ligeia's beauty passed into my spirit, there dwelling as in a shrine, I derived, from many existences in the material world, a sentiment such as I felt always aroused within me by her large and luminous orbs. Yet not the more could I define that sentiment, or analyze, or even steadily view it. I recognized it, let me repeat, sometimes in the survey of a rapidly-growing vine—in the contemplation of a moth, a butterfly, a chrysalis, a stream of running water. I have felt it in the ocean; in the falling of a meteor. I have felt it in the glances of unusually aged people. And there are one or two stars in heaven—(one especially, a star of the sixth magnitude, double and changeable, to be found near the large star in Lyra) in a telescopic scrutiny of which I have been made aware of the feeling. I have been filled with it by certain sounds from stringed instruments, and not unfrequently by passages from books. Among innumerable other instances, I well remember something in a volume of Joseph Glanvill, which (perhaps merely from its quaintness—who shall say?) never failed to inspire me with the sentiment;—'And the will therein lieth, which dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigor? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.' "

Later, we shall have occasion to recall this passage, with its displacement and defusion of the Mother's beauty upon, and over, the whole of nature, from the vine (provider of the wine Poe loved so well!), to the stars and that eternal mother symbol, the ocean.

Poe's highly personal æsthetic standards were intimately bound with his mother complex; the fragile actress, his mother, was always to remain for him the prototype of all beauty. We may attribute to this cause both his statement that the most poetic of all themes is the death of a beautiful woman,¹ and the violence with which he attacked all who profaned or slighted Art or Beauty. His vehemence in such matters had its roots deep in his life and instincts.

But what are we to think of this extract from Glanvill, which Poe

¹ *The Philosophy of Composition*. (Cf. page 45.)

Ligeia

quotes at the head of his tale? Here, the analyst would say, we have a wish-phantasy in which the orphan, abandoned by his mother in death, credits her with a desire, a love, that is of a strength to make her triumph over death and return to him. That is the basic, unconscious, desire from which the tale of Ligeia was born.

But to return to Ligeia's learning. Not only had the hero of the tale found his bride, as the child finds its mother, without effort or seeking, nor any knowledge of her origins or "paternal name", (possibly a device of the wish-phantasy to suppress the envied rival, the father) but, like Morella, the bride possesses the maternal attribute of omniscience. Here we may have some unconscious echo of the brilliant actress-mother who could recite, sing and dance, and whom her little son must oft have admired on the stage. As we have already suggested, however, this omniscience in Poe's Ligeias and Morellas primarily, doubtless, symbolizes the mother's omniscience in sexual matters. Every mother, to the small boy who loves her with childish passion, must appear the source of all endearments and caresses, as of all wisdom in unknown, "forbidden" matters. Little Edgar, doubtless a precocious child, lost his mother when three; that is, when infantile sex curiosity is already active. And so we find, in these omniscient women of his tales, women of whom he is the disciple, vague reminiscences of, and yearnings for, that wished-for but too early-lost teacher whom he must so unconsciously have missed—in spite of the maternal tenderness of Frances Allan—all through his childhood, as through his existence.

So Ligeia's husband continues:

. . . "the acquisitions of Ligeia were gigantic, were astounding; yet I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a childlike confidence, to her guidance through the chaotic world of metaphysical investigation at which I was most busily occupied during the earlier years of our marriage. With how vast a triumph—with how vivid a delight—with how much of all that is ethereal in hope—did I *feel*, as she bent over me in studies but little sought—but less known—that delicious vista by slow degrees expanding before me, down whose long, gorgeous, and all untrodden path, I might at length pass onward to the goal of a wisdom too divinely precious not to be forbidden!"

Yet this wisdom is destined to remain as "forbidden" to Ligeia's husband, as to the real Poe. Ligeia falls ill before she can fully initiate him into her portentous science, in the very way Elizabeth herself fell ill and died, before she could initiate her son into "forbidden" matters.

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Thereafter, Poe, like many another man afflicted with impotence, remained fixated on his lost mother, incapable thenceforth of being sexually initiated by any other woman. "Without Ligeia", says the hero. "I was but as a child groping benighted."

Meanwhile, signs of approaching death appear in Ligeia's frame, as once in that of his actress mother: "The wild eyes blazed with a too—too glorious effulgence;" (indeed, may not the "strangeness" of these "large orbs" have derived from the feverish glitter of the dilated eyes of his dying mother?); "the pale fingers became of the transparent waxen hue of the grave, and the blue veins upon the lofty forehead swelled and sank impetuously with the tides of the most gentle emotion. I saw that she must die. . ."

Now begins Ligeia's battle with death: ". . . the intensity of her wild desire for life,—for life—but for life" appals her husband. Yet it is her love of him, her dread of abandoning him, that makes her so avid to live.

. . . "in death only, was I fully impressed with the strength of her affection. For long hours, detaining my hand, would she pour out before me the overflowing of a heart whose more than passionate devotion amounted to idolatry. How had I deserved to be blessed by such confessions?—how had I deserved to be so cursed with the removal of my beloved in the hour of her making them? But upon this subject I cannot bear to dilate. Let me say only, that in Ligeia's more than womanly abandonment to a love, alas! all unmerited, all unworthily bestowed, I at length recognized the principle of her longing with so wildly earnest a desire for the life which was now fleeing so rapidly away."

Does not this picture seem to reflect some real reminiscence of Edgar's mother? Knowing herself near death, alone with her two children, would she not, often and passionately, have pressed her boy to her breast (doubtless the child she loved best—as being a boy and preternaturally intelligent), and held his little hand in her wasted fingers with a wild yet hopeless yearning to live, only to live, since she was all that he had?

Comes the fatal night. Ligeia feels she is dying. She asks her husband to repeat "certain verses composed by herself not many days before" and he thereupon recites *The Conqueror Worm*, a poem in which helpless humanity, like marionettes the angels use for their plays, are slain and devoured by the Worm. And this is indeed our human fate—and such is to be Ligeia's after that night.

Ligeia then dies defying the Worm and, with her last breath, murmurs

Ligeia

Glanvill's words which say that the power of the human will can overcome death.

Poe spares us a description of her corpse, which would have impeded the deepening horror of the tale, and only describes the grief of the unhappy husband. We then learn, for no apparent reason, that the husband has inherited a vast fortune from his wife.

"I had no lack of what the world calls wealth. Ligeia had brought me far more, very far more than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals."

The hero of the tale might just as well have been rich in his own right, but Poe instinctively lends Ligeia this final attribute of the mother—wealth and abundance—that she may heap kindness on her husband in the same way that a mother, with gifts, seeks to compensate the child for its biologically imposed inadequacies. Thus, "After a few months . . . of weary and aimless wandering," our hero—who has left the dark and ruined city on the banks of the Rhine where he dwelt with Ligeia—retires to "one of the wildest and least frequented portions of fair England". There, thanks to his immense fortune, he purchases an abbey, the name of which he does not disclose. It was a place of "gloomy and dreary grandeur", surrounded by a domain of almost savage aspect, full of "melancholy and time-honoured memories". While altering but little the external aspect of the abbey, or the "verdant decay hanging about it", he gives way, as he says,

"with a child-like perversity, and perchance with a faint hope of alleviating my sorrows, to a display of more than regal magnificence within".

From the viewpoint of scholastic psychology, this would seem hardly probable. A man crushed by grief and one, who, as he tells us, is an opium-eater, which hardly inspires activity, does not usually assume the extra effort of setting up a new home. Yet everything is possible and, be that as it may, to me it seems that in this sudden display of wealth after Ligeia's death, we find again an echo of something that occurred in Poe's childhood: his adoption, after his mother's death, by the rich Frances Allan, and his removal to luxurious surroundings, which must have greatly contrasted with the "old decaying city" in which he had earlier dwelt with Ligeia-Elizabeth. Another detail of the story would seem to bear this out; the fact that the hero then settles in "fair England". Was it not here that Edgar was brought, when six, by his foster-parents, to be sent, at eight, to the Manor House School at Stoke Newington, then a "Gothic" village whose great trees were always to live in his mind.

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It may be objected, however, that it is Ligeia who provides the wealth bestowed on the hero, and not her successor. But we shall soon see why.

Now, Ligeia's inconsolable widower, "in a moment of mental alienation", leads from the altar "as the successor of the unforgotten Ligeia—the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine". He then brings her to a bridal chamber of which he thus writes:

"Where were the souls of the haughty family of the bride, when, through thirst of gold, they permitted to pass the threshold of an apartment so bedecked, a maiden and a daughter so beloved?"

Follows a description of the lofty turret bridal chamber, with its sumptuous and sinister decorations, its leaden-hued glass in the sole window, its gloomy ceiling, and its black granite Egyptian sarcophagus in each of the four corners. A single hanging lamp sheds parti-coloured light on the interior, while heavy hangings of gold brocade, patterned with strange monsters, which stir in a constant stream of air circulating round the walls, provide a background of sinister animation to the tragedy about to take place in this chamber.

Ligeia's husband hates Rowena, his second wife. To Poe, in fact, Rowena represents a betrayal, the profanation of a sacred memory. We may venture a guess at the dual being whom, with her blue eyes and fair hair—symbols of *difference*, of contrast—she embodies. What was Edgar's first great infidelity to his real mother if not, in fact, his affection for Frances Allan? And with whom did that same Edgar betray her, when the story was written, if not with his cousin Virginia, whom he had just, in 1835, married? Thus, it seems to me that Rowena epitomises both these women, whereas the second Morella represents only Virginia, his "betrothed" at the time. Hence the greater emphasis on the betrayal in the story of Rowena: it is the foster-son of Frances Allan, as much as Virginia's husband—however inadequate he might be—whose voice we hear in this tale.

There is much to interest us in the way the very real love Poe felt for his "Ma", and then for his "Sis", as he called Virginia, is thus converted into hatred: it is a device for condemning them both, morally, as blameworthy. Whereas, in *Morella*, love for the mother is converted into aversion, in consequence of the incest-barrier—only father-daughter love being permissible, for Virginia had not yet lured Poe into marriage—in *Ligeia* we find the position reversed, and the son's mother-love restored in all its primal and paramount intensity.

Thus, Rowena's husband confesses:

"I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My memory flew back, (oh, with what intensity of regret!) to Ligeia, the beloved, the august, the beautiful, the entombed. I revelled in recollections of her purity, of her wisdom, of her lofty, her ethereal nature, of her passionate, her idolatrous love. . . In the excitement of my opium dreams (for I was habitually fettered in the shackles of the drug) I would call aloud upon her name, during the silence of the night, or among the sheltered recesses of the glens by day, as if, through the wild eagerness, the solemn passion, the consuming ardor of my longing for the departed, I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned—ah, *could* it be forever?—upon the earth."

Thereupon, the miracle by which the dead woman avenges her husband's infidelity, and the conjoined miracle of her reincarnation in another, begins to take place. In the second month of her marriage, Rowena is "attacked with sudden illness, from which her recovery was slow. The fever which consumed her rendered her nights uneasy. . ." In other words, Rowena succumbs to the same mysterious "languor" which afflicted Frances Allan and which may already have attacked Virginia: a malady with one inexorable issue. For when Rowena has recovered from this first attack,

"but a brief period elapsed, ere a second more violent disorder again threw her upon a bed of suffering; and from this attack her frame, at all times feeble, never altogether recovered. Her illnesses were, after this epoch, of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians."

Meanwhile, the supernatural influence which has decreed the young wife's fate, reveals itself in the strange "sounds" and "motions" which Rowena observes in the dark and tapestried turret-chamber.

One night, late in September, Rowena, who at all times these "motions" have disquieted, is suddenly seized with terror:

"... a deadly pallor, overspreading her face, had proved to me that my exertions to reassure her would be fruitless. She appeared to be fainting, and no attendants were within call. I remembered where was deposited a decanter of light wine which had been ordered by her physicians, and hastened across the chamber to procure it."

At this moment, however, the husband feels "some palpable although invisible object" pass lightly by, and observes a shadow on the carpet. But, since he is under the influence of an "immoderate dose of opium",

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he pays little heed to these things and fills a goblet of wine and puts it to the lips of his swooning wife.

"It was then that I became distinctly aware of a gentle foot-fall upon the carpet, and near the couch; and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby-colored fluid. If this I saw—not so Rowena. She swallowed the wine unhesitatingly. . ."

Three days later Rowena was dead.

Thus the first wife, with some drops of ruby-coloured fluid (which irresistibly remind us of the hæmorrhages of Elizabeth Arnold) draws her rival, after her, to the same doom, in exactly the way Elizabeth Arnold might seem to have done to Frances Allan and Mrs. Stanard, though not, as yet, to Virginia.

The husband's solitary vigil in the sinister death chamber, by Rowena's shrouded corpse, provides the last of the acts of this three-act story. Gazing upon Rowena's corpse, the widower's sole thought is of Ligeia, "the one only and supremely beloved".

He has already informed us that he has taken much opium, and now, gradually, the dead Ligeia miraculously returns in the person of her victim, though her unworthy surrogate.

"It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my reverie—I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony—the bed of death." The horrified watcher then perceives that "a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up within the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids."

He thereupon strives to reanimate the wife he still thinks living, but:

"In a short period it was certain, however, that a relapse had taken place; . . . a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened".

The widower thereupon sinks again into his "passionate waking visions of Ligeia".

An hour later, life once more seeks to enter Rowena's body and he "saw—distinctly saw—a tremor upon the lips. In a minute afterward they relaxed, disclosing a bright line of the pearly teeth"—teeth which Edgar had doubtless seen between his mother's drawn lips, when feeling

Ligeia

her corpse-cold hand: the "*marble hand*" of Morella and Ligeia. But life seems positively to return, for:

"There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; a perceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart".

Yet in vain the husband dutifully multiplies his efforts: Rowena soon relapses into a death more hideous than ever.

These resuscitations and relapses alternate for the greater part of the night. Then, however,

"she who had been dead, once again stirred—and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter hopelessness than any. . . The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance—the limbs relaxed—and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily together, and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of Death. But if this idea was not, even then, altogether adopted, I could at least doubt no longer, when, arising from the bed, tottering, with feeble steps, with closed eyes, and with the manner of one bewildered in a dream, the thing that was enshrouded advanced boldly and palpably into the middle of the apartment."

The petrified onlooker gazes on this apparition and wonders can this truly be the Lady of Tremaine—

". . . but *had she then grown taller since her malady?*" (Cf. *Berenice*). "What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound, and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch, she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber, huge masses of long and dishevelled hair; *it was blacker than the raven wings of midnight!* And now slowly opened *the eyes* of the figure which stood before me. 'Here then, at least,' I shrieked aloud, 'can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY LIGEIA.'"

Thus, does Poe unwittingly declare, that every later love from Frances Allan to Virginia and her successors, would never be other than a re-incarnation of his first undying love for his mother—still living in his unconscious—and ever to be reactivated by each new passion. Here too, he

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also formulates one of the prime conditions of these passions: that the woman with whom he is to make the effort to prove unfaithful to the mother he knew as a child must, like her, bear the marks of sickness and death. For it is only when death has taken her from him, that the husband can at last love Rowena, since only then can he superimpose Ligeia's corpse upon hers and so, once more, in this gruesome fashion, re-experience his first erotic delights.

From the time they are bereaved, Ligeia's husband, like Berenice's lover, are opium addicts. It will be remembered that, when he and Virginia were in Baltimore, when his first great tales were being written, Poe was apparently taking opium which, like all drugs, relaxes the control of the moral censor and so permits the infantile material buried in the unconscious to re-emerge. In this instance, it enabled Elizabeth-Ligeia to rise from her tomb.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Fall of the House of Usher¹

WHEN Poe wrote *The Fall of the House of Usher*, a year or two after his marriage, it must have been clear that Virginia, his sister-wife, would not live long.

Roderick Usher, the hero of this tale, is not, this time, the narrator but the real protagonist, though the compound of Usher and the narrator is, as usual, Poe.

After a solitary journey on horseback, in which he has traversed "a singularly dreary tract of country", a traveller finds himself at last, "as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher". Such are the situation and aspect of the manor that, with the first glimpse, "a sense of insufferable gloom" pervades his spirit. Merely to look upon the scene,

"upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees" inspires "an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. . . What was it . . . that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? . . . I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth."

Roderick Usher's friend, like Ligeia's husband, thus senses that mysterious "accord" between persons and things, which emanates from the

¹ *The Fall of the House of Usher*: *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1839; 1840; 1845.

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unconscious, of which Baudelaire was later to write. Trying to shake off his sense of oppression, the traveller reins in his horse on

“the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows”.

Thus, is created the “atmosphere” of this tale which suffuses the characters, their appearance, spirits, habitation and locale with the same leaden hue. But this story is dominated by a new factor, one absent from *Berenice* and *Morella*, though perceptible in *Ligeia*: the *animate setting*. In this respect, *The Fall of the House of Usher* also belongs to the *Mother-as-Landscape* series of tales, with which we shall deal later. The story, however, will be analysed here, since the figure of the Lady Madeline is at least of equal importance and seems to place the tale here.

Roderick Usher, who owns the manor, is the last scion of an ancient, decayed house. He has begged the traveller, a childhood friend not seen for years, to come to his aid. His letter, in a hand that betrays “nervous agitation”, tells of “acute bodily illness” . . . and an oppressive “mental disorder”.

Roderick’s family has been noted “time out of mind” for a “peculiar sensibility of temperament”, expressed in many works of exalted art, and a passionate devotion to the “intricacies” of music. Yet . . .

“the Usher race, all time-honoured as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, . . . the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the ‘House of Usher’—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.”

Thus, Poe informs us that the males of the line, from father to son, could justifiably regard themselves as the very “sons”, moulded by it in its image, of their strange and lugubrious habitation. Since *Fatherland*

The Fall of the House of Usher

and *patrimony* both, however, signify that which is owned by the father, and the father's dearest possession is the mother, of which the "father-land", representing the nourishing mother-earth, is but the greatly magnified extension, a similar transference has clearly taken place in regard to the patrimony of the Ushers.

But let us return to our traveller:

"I have said that the sole effect of my . . . experiment—that of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular impression . . . when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy . . . that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued."

Something, in fact, like the atmosphere round a corpse, which Poe here concretises and will visualise still more vividly, later.

The traveller now more closely examines the "real aspect of the building".

"Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinising observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zig-zag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn."

This description of the manor; the death-like pallor of its surface, covered with its "web-work" of fungi; and the inner decay which contrasts with its outer intact appearance, might well make one think of a corpse preserved in some forgotten vault, remote from the air. As for the fissure

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that runs from top to bottom, this, in symbolic form, recalls the "cloven body of the woman," of which Zola speaks.¹

But let us turn from this Mother-Mansion for an instant and regard the son it bore, Roderick Usher, the traveller's boyhood friend, whom he remeets after long wanderings through winding corridors and up dark stairs.

The furniture of the dim and lofty apartment in which Usher awaits his guest was

"profuse, comfortless, antique, and tattered. Many books and musical instruments lay scattered about, but failed to give any vitality to the scene." From the windows, "long, narrow, and pointed, and at so vast a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within" . . . "feeble gleams of encrimsoned light" fall on the figure of Usher.

"Upon my entrance, Usher arose from a sofa on which he had been lying at full length. . . I gazed upon him with a feeling half of pity, half of awe. Surely, man had never before so terribly altered, in so brief a period, as had Roderick Usher! . . . Yet the character of his face had been at all times remarkable. A cadaverousness of complexion; an eye large, liquid, and luminous beyond comparison; lips somewhat thin and very pallid, but of a surpassingly beautiful curve; a nose of a delicate Hebrew model, but with a breadth of nostril unusual in similar formations; a finely moulded chin, speaking, in its want of prominence, of a want of moral energy; hair of a more than weblike softness and tenuity; these features, with an inordinate expansion above the regions of the temple, made up altogether a countenance not easily to be forgotten."

But let us turn for an instant to the Plates facing pages 98, 171, 209. How strangely Poe's own portraits fit this description and serve to identify the two. The "large, liquid, and luminous" eyes, the unusual prominence of the brow, are specially striking. Other features, however, are greatly exaggerated, such as the "gossamer" hair which "had been suffered to grow all unheeded", until it "floated rather than fell about the face", with an "Arabesque expression" foreign to "any idea of simple humanity".

Usher is in a condition of intense nervous excitement, which does not surprise his friend, knowing his temperament, and prepared by the dark hints in his letter.

¹ "La carcasse fendue de la femelle", Zola, *La Terre*. (Paris, Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1888.)

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"His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision . . . to . . . that leaden, self-balanced, and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement."

Poe, indeed, spoke from knowledge!

In such tones Usher talks of the reason for his friend's visit and discourses on his malady. He also describes the "morbid acuteness of the senses" from which he suffers, so that

"the most insipid food was alone endurable; he could wear only garments of certain texture; the odours of all flowers were oppressive; his eyes were tortured by even a faint light; and there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror".

He is also a slave to "an anomalous species of terror".

" 'I shall perish,' said he, 'I *must* perish in this deplorable folly . . . I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in terror. In this unnerved—in this pitiable condition—I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.' "

From this description it is apparent that Usher suffers from an acute form of anxiety-hysteria—doubtless already familiar to his creator, given Poe's phantom-ridden soul! As for the House, he being its son, Usher now reveals that

"He was enchained by certain superstitious impressions in regard to the dwelling which he tenanted, and whence, for many years, he had never ventured forth"

—to which he, therefore, clung, as it were, to his mother,— and was enchained also by

"an influence which some peculiarities in the mere form and substance of his family mansion had, by dint of long sufferance, he said, obtained over his spirit—an effect which the *physique* of the gray walls and turrets, and of the dim tarn into which they all looked down, had, at length, brought about upon the *morale* of his existence".

Thus Usher fears the *heredity* he derives from the deathly Mother-Mansion, and its tendency to render its owners like unto itself.

After which Usher, "although with hesitation", speaks of his only and "tenderly beloved" sister, and of her "severe and long-continued illness". Clearly her condition plays no small part in his melancholy

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for: "Her decease . . . would leave him (him the hopeless and the frail) the last of the ancient race of the Ushers".

At that moment his sister, the Lady Madeline, "passed slowly through a remote portion of the apartment" and disappeared, without noticing the visitor's presence.

"The disease of the Lady Madeline", like that of all Poe's heroines, "had long baffled the skill of her physicians". And, in effect, in Poe's day, medical science was helpless before the disease which now attacked Virginia as, some thirty years before, it attacked Elizabeth Arnold.

"A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, and frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character, was the unusual diagnosis."

Poe, here, doubtless attributes to Madeline the increasing apathy and debility he daily observed in Virginia. To this, however, he adds—premonitory symptom of that ultimate attribute his unconscious was to bestow on every woman he loved—cataleptic trances which simulate the outward signs of death. From these, the "epileptic" Berenice also suffered. Diagnostic accuracy did not trouble Poe.

Now the Lady Madeline who, so far, had "steadily borne up against the pressure of her malady", takes to her bed that evening, never again to rise

"For several days ensuing, her name was unmentioned by either Usher or myself; and during this period I was busied in earnest endeavours to alleviate the melancholy of my friend. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar."

Thus Roderick, like Poe himself, seeks to assuage his anguish in the magic world of art. His improvisations, however, are strange, "phantasmagoric", like the picture he has painted of

"the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible; yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendor."

We shall comment on this description in connection with another subterranean vault, described later in the tale.

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Roderick Usher is also a gifted poet who composes to his own accompaniment on the guitar. Thus was conceived the poem of *The Haunted Palace*, in which we learn that Usher-Poe is fully conscious of "the tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne". It is interesting to note that in this tale, in which the Mother is unconsciously symbolized by a manor house, the son, in his turn, likens himself, though consciously, to a palace. Not without reason did the "suggestions arising from this ballad" lead the two friends

"into a train of thought wherein there became manifest an opinion of Usher's, which I mention not so much on account of its novelty, (for other men have thought thus,) as on account of the pertinacity with which he maintained it. This opinion, in its general form, was that of the sentience of all vegetable things. But, in his disordered fancy, the idea had assumed a more daring character, and trespassed, under certain conditions, upon the kingdom of inorganization. I lack words to express the full extent, or the earnest *abandon* of his persuasion. The belief, however, was connected (as I have previously hinted) with the gray stones of the home of his forefathers. The conditions of the sentience had been here, he imagined, fulfilled in the method of collocation of these stones—in the order of their arrangement, as well as in that of the many *fungi* which overspread them, and of the decayed trees which stood around—above all, in the long undisturbed endurance of this arrangement, and in its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn. Its evidence—the evidence of the sentience—was to be seen . . . in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls."

Thus does Usher-Poe express the inner truth of the matter: namely, that the manor—its curse, its tarn and its "atmosphere"—is but a transference from one who once existed: the dead mother who still survived in the unconscious memory of her son.

And now are mentioned the mystical works which form the visionary's favourite reading, the *Ververt et Chartreuse de Gresset*¹ among them! We also learn that Usher, as might be expected, took especial delight

"in the perusal of an exceedingly rare and curious book in quarto Gothic—the manual of a forgotten church—the *Vigilia Mortuorum secundum Chorum Ecclesiæ Maguntinæ*".

One evening, Usher informs his friend that the Lady Madeline is no more and states his intention

¹ Poe appears never to have read this work. The *Vert-Vert* of Gresset, is, in fact, a humorous tale about a parrot.

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“ of preserving her corpse for a fortnight, (previously to its final interment,) in one of the numerous vaults within the main walls of the building”

to protect it from the curiosity of the doctors who, intrigued by the mysterious nature of the malady, might venture to violate the family vault, which lay “in a remote and exposed situation”. A curious reason—but one apparently justified by the “sinister countenance” of the family physician. The two men, therefore, coffin the body and carry it unaided to its “temporary entombment”.

“The vault in which we placed it (and which had been so long unopened that our torches, half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere, gave us little opportunity for investigation) was small, damp, and entirely without means of admission for light; lying, at great depth, immediately beneath that portion of the building in which was my own sleeping apartment. It had been used, apparently, in remote feudal times, for the worst purposes of a donjon-keep, and, in later days, as a place of deposit for powder, or some other highly combustible substance, as a portion of its floor, and the whole interior of a long archway through which we reached it, were carefully sheathed with copper. The door, of massive iron, had been, also, similarly protected. Its immense weight caused an unusually sharp grating sound, as it moved upon its hinges.”

There, in this “region of horror”, they place their “mournful burden upon tressels”, and then partially move the coffin lid aside to gaze, once more, on the face of the dead woman.

“A striking similitude between the brother and sister now first arrested my attention; and Usher, divining, perhaps, my thoughts, murmured out some few words from which I learned that the deceased and himself had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them. Our glances, however, rested not long upon the dead—for we could not regard her unawed. The disease which had just entombed the lady in the maturity of youth, had left, as usual in all maladies of a strictly cataleptical character, the mockery of a faint blush upon the bosom and the face, and that suspiciously lingering smile upon the lip which is so terrible in death.”

Thus, like Rowena-Ligeia, the Lady Madeline, in her way, once more reproduces the nightmare of Life-in-Death. The two men replace the coffin lid, screw it down and return to the upper apartments.

The fashion in which the Lady Madeline is spoken of, makes it clear that, in the main, she represents Virginia. The former is Usher’s twin

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sister, as Poe liked to imagine his "Sissy" to be. "Sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature" also united Poe to his child-wife. This feeling of inexplicability doubtless resulted from the transference to Virginia of Poe's earlier repressed loves: it was his repressed incestuous attachment to his sister, as to his mother, which must have helped to give its "inexplicable" character to the mysterious "sympathy" felt by Poe for his wife.

Then again, there is the vault, that black replica of the white subterranean chamber painted by Usher. To it, the Lady Madeline is brought to be buried. This vault, in the Mother-Mansion, brings to mind the maternal *cloaca* from which Madeline, like Usher, issued. In analytic terms, this would be described as a phantasy of return to the mother's womb, which seems to confirm that, in phantasy, Poe had established a blood-relationship between himself and Virginia. The *whiteness* of the vault in Usher's painting may be compared with the white landscape which closes *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, both being examples of the same mother-symbolism, the nature of which will become clearer when we deal with that tale. The *blackness* of the vault in the tale, with its metal sheathing is however an anal symbol, and suggests those intestinal regions from which children, in their infantile sexual theories, imagine themselves to emerge. With a ruthlessness that may surprise those unfamiliar with the workings of the unconscious, the brother relegates his sister to these prenatal regions.

But Madeline, it must be remembered, is not only Usher-Poe's sister—she is also a double of the mother previously represented by the mansion. It was the repetition-compulsion that governs our lives which, in fact, forced Poe to re-embody his mother and her sad destiny—in greater or less degree—in each of the women he loved.

Yet, having proved unfaithful to the mother, in being able to love another, though in his unconscious he remained fidelity itself, due punishment must be visited on Usher-Poe.

"... some days of bitter grief having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue . . . and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. . . I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound."

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One stormy night—the seventh or eighth after the Lady Madeline is interred—Usher's friend, increasingly agitated, finds sleep impossible as he lies in his gloomy chamber over the castle vaults. In vain he struggles to shake off his nervousness, but:

“An irrepressible tremour gradually pervaded my frame; and, at length, there sat upon my very heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm. Shaking this off with a gasp and a struggle, I uplifted myself upon the pillows, and, peering earnestly within the intense darkness of the chamber, hearkened . . . to certain low and indefinite sounds which came, through the pauses of the storm, at long intervals, I knew not whence.”

Whereupon he rises, hastily throws on his clothes, and paces the room in an effort to regain his composure.

At this moment, Usher enters, bearing a lamp.

“His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan—but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes—an evidently restrained *hysteria* in his whole demeanor. His air appalled me—but anything was preferable to the solitude I had so long endured. . . .”

“After having stared about him for some moments in silence,” Usher abruptly exclaims, “. . . you have not then seen it?”—and hurries to one of the casement windows, and throws it open to the storm.

Thereupon the Mother-Mansion, in the terror and beauty of the storm, is seen to be alive with a fantastic, death-life of its own. Swift low clouds seem almost to raze the turrets, and the house appears to have become the meeting place of winds and vapours from every quarter of the sky.

“ . . . the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapour, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which hung about and enshrouded the mansion.”

Thus the image of the shroud becomes concrete. Like the House of Usher, Poe's mother, too, was once “enshrouded” in the “gaseous exhalation” which so soon surrounds the corpse.

Now the narrator shuts the window, crying to Usher that he must not look on this sight, though he himself is shuddering with terror, for “These appearances . . . are merely electrical phenomena . . . or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn”.

Then, taking up a book, the *Mad Trist*, by Sir Launcelot Canning, he begins to read aloud in hope of distracting his friend.

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"I had arrived," explains the narrator, "at that well-known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrator run thus:

*"And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and malicious turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest!"*¹

Here the reader pauses, hearing, or imagining he hears,

"from some very remote portion of the mansion . . . what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described".

Nevertheless, he resumes his reading:

"But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the malicious hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanour, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend entwined—

"Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;

Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win".

*'And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard.'*¹

Once more there is an interruption in the reading, for now he hears

"a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound—the exact counterpart of . . . 'the dragon's unnatural shriek . . .'"

¹ Author's italics.

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The friend refrains from remarking on these sounds in order to avoid "exciting . . . the sensitive nervousness" of his companion. Nevertheless, he notices that

"he had gradually brought round his chair, so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber".

His head had dropped on his breast, his lips trembled, and his eyes were rigidly fixed. Having perceived this the friend resumes his reading:

" *'And now, the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking-up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound'* ".¹

Hardly have the words been said, when

"as if a shield of brass had indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver—I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic, and clangorous, yet apparently muffled reverberation".

The friend hastens to Usher's chair, where like a madman, he sits rocking, his eyes bent fixedly before him. Feeling his friend's hand on his shoulder, Usher smiles a wan smile, and speaks to himself "in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur.

" 'Not hear it?—yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long—long—long—many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it—yet I dared not—oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am!—I dared not—I *dared* not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!* . . . And now—to-night—Ethelred—ha! ha!—the breaking of the hermit's door, and the death-cry of the dragon, and the clangour of the shield!—say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! Oh whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? MADMAN! . . . MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR!' "

Whereupon the massive doors swing open to a gust of wind, and

¹ Author's italics.

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"there DID stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes" (once more we think of Elizabeth Arnold and her hæmoptyses) "and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold, then, with a low moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother, and in her violent and now final death-agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse, and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated."

Horror-struck, the friend rushes from the room and house. Outside, amid the tempest, as he crosses the old causeway, something makes him look back. He then sees that the "full, setting, and blood-red moon" gleams through the gaping zig-zag fissure which now runs from roof to base of the building.

This fissure rapidly widens, the wind rages with new fury, and the massive walls crash asunder.

"... there was a long tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters—and the deep and dark tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the 'HOUSE OF USHER'."

Thus the mansion, Lady Madeline's double in so far as she herself is a mother-symbol to Poe-Usher, also repeats her fate in this sudden dissolution. The narrator-friend, Usher's double, escapes from death—or rather from the dead and avenging mother, who has seized the latter from beyond the grave—since someone had to be left to tell the story.

But the deeper meaning of this sinister tale lies in the fate of Usher. Poe is *punished* for having betrayed his mother in loving Madeline-Virginia. Usher-Poe is *punished* for not having dared to seek and rewin his babyhood mother when, like Annabel Lee, men bore her away, and also for his silence and acceptance, in his childish incomprehension of death. Usher-Poe is *punished* for his sadism, as shown in the way Usher treated his sister. Finally, Usher-Poe is *punished* for his infantile incestuous wishes towards his mother, as witness all the quotations from the *Mad Trist*. The legendary theme of the dragon, which must be killed to win some woman—with or without the aid of treasure—is as old as the world. It is a perfect expression of the Œdipus wish: the dragon, symbol of the father, is killed and the mother set free to belong to the victorious son. It is the theme of the legend of Perseus and Andromeda, of Siegfried and Brunhild. The woman in the extracts quoted from the *Mad Trist* remains hidden, but this is due to the strength of Poe's sexual repressions. That Ethelred should force his way into the dwelling of the

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hermit—but another father-figure—by an act which may also be taken as the symbol of a sexual attack upon the mother,¹ that he should slay the fire-breathing dragon and possess himself of the magic shield, can only be motivated by an ulterior aim—the conquest of a woman which, being prohibited, brings its own punishment therewith.

When the Lady Madeline, representative, as it were, of the deadly mansion, returns from the tomb to seek her brother, it is as the emissary of justice. Nevertheless, Poe's phantasy of the mother who will return from the grave to find her son and claim him in death—a phantasy which was to dog his unconscious to the day, when in Baltimore, it came to pass—was not only a phantasy of retribution, but one of wish-fulfilment. All neurotic symptoms and phantasies, however, similarly develop from two conflicting factors. The horrible death of which Madeline is the instrument, constitutes her brother's punishment in this life, though at the same time making possible the gratification of his desires in that other "life-in-death" which will thenceforth be his. There, at last, he might sing, paraphrasing the ending of *Annabel Lee*—

"And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there *in the tarn*,
In the depths of the stagnant tarn"—

That tarn, in which the House of Usher sleeps forever: brother with sister and mother with son.

¹ Cf. Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy*, *Collected Papers*, III, p. 149. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. Translated from *Analyse der Phobie eines funfjahrigen Knaben*, 1909, *Ges. Werke*, Band VII.

CHAPTER XXVII

Eleonora¹

IN January, 1842, Virginia had her first hæmoptysis—in her case evidencing a far-advanced consumptive condition—while singing one evening for friends. It was doubtless this, or his wife's now rapidly declining health, that influenced Poe's tale of *Eleonora*.

Whereas *The Fall of the House of Usher* is a story of retribution for infidelity to the mother, *Eleonora* tells of forgiveness for this crime, because of the basic *fidelity* by which it was conditioned.

Poe had already touched on the idea of *Oneness* in the words he quotes from Plato at the head of *Morella*: "Itself, by itself solely, ONE everlastingly, and single". The heading to *Eleonora* expresses a similar sentiment on another plane: "Sub conservatione formæ specificæ salva anima".

In *Eleonora* we once more find a hero descended from a race "noted for vigor of fancy and ardor of passion". Men have called him mad, he tells us, but

"They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their gray visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awaking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret. In snatches, they learn something of the wisdom which is of good, and more of the mere knowledge which is of evil."

In other words, Poe himself is again the hero, with his vague intuitions, troublesome but persistent, of a "great secret" that lies in his unconscious.

"She whom I loved in youth . . . was the sole daughter of the only sister of my mother long departed. Eleonora was the name of my cousin. We had always dwelled together, beneath a tropical sun, in

¹ *Eleonora*: *The Gift*, 1842; *Broadway Journal*, I, 21.

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the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass. No unguided footstep ever came upon that vale; for it lay far away up among a range of giant hills that hung beetling around about it, shutting out the sunlight from its sweetest recesses. No path was trodden in its vicinity; and, to reach our happy home, there was need of putting back, with force, the foliage of many thousands of forest trees, and of crushing to death the glories of many millions of fragrant flowers. Thus it was that we lived all alone, knowing nothing of the world without the valley,—I, and my cousin, and her mother.”

This is a perfect symbolic description of the sentimental retirement in which Poe lived with Virginia and her mother in their little world of three. The very transformation of Mrs. Clemm from paternal to maternal aunt, has its justification in psychic reality since, for Poe, both Muddy and Sissy were of the spiritual lineage of that “mother long departed”.

Poe continues his description of this enchanted valley, through which flows a river known as the River of Silence, “brighter than all save the eyes of Eleonora”. Its carpet of soft green grass is “thick, short, perfectly even, and vanilla-perfumed”, and “besprinkled throughout with the yellow buttercup, the white daisy, the purple violet, and the ruby-red asphodel”—(that fanciful flower possibly premonitory of death—death preceded by hæmoptyses). The bark of the “fantastic trees”, that slant upwards to the light like “wildernesses of dreams”, is “speckled with the vivid alternate splendor of ebony and silver”—(funereal hues!)—and is “smoother than all save the cheeks of Eleonora”. The animate landscape of this tale thus seems to be a continuation, reflection or double, of the ethereal maiden who now becomes the hero’s betrothed.

“Hand in hand about this valley, for fifteen years, roamed I with Eleonora before Love entered within our hearts. It was one evening at the close of the third lustrum of her life, and of the fourth of my own, that we sat, locked in each other’s embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees, and looked down within the waters of the River of Silence at our images therein. . . We had drawn the god Eros from that wave. . .”

When she married, Virginia was thirteen and her cousin twenty-six. Here the difference in age is reduced, but the virgin bride is still under fifteen.

The Valley of the Many-Coloured Grass which, as in the House of Usher, manifestly counterfeits the heroine, now assumes the hues of passion:

“Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet

deepened; and when, one by one, the white daisies shrank away, there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten of the ruby-red asphodel."

Thus, despite all the new and ardent life of the landscape, the blood-red asphodel, flower of death, blooms in yet greater profusion once the betrothal takes place.

"And life arose in our paths; for the tall flamingo, hitherto unseen, with all gay glowing birds, flaunted his scarlet plumage before us."

Gold and silver fish haunt the river, which now, in spite of its name, gives forth a "lulling melody", while a bright and "voluminous" cloud settles on the mountain tops and shuts in the valley with a canopy of crimson and gold.

Such is the landscape which Poe paints as one of utter enchantment. Yet the effect on the reader is stifling. Few people would care to dwell in a setting such as that of Poe's tales. Not only is this true of the more lugubrious landscapes, as for instance that of the House of Usher, but it is true of those which Poe presents as idyllic and smiling. In their studied sweetness and artificiality, these landscapes are hardly less repellant than the others; nowhere do we breathe the freshness of nature or open air.

For each of us, nature is but the extension of that primitive narcissism which, in infancy, absorbed into itself the mother who fed and surrounded us with care. But since Poe's mother died early, and he knew her as a corpse, (the corpse, it is true, of a young and lovely woman), what more natural than that his imagined landscapes should assume, even when most radiant and blooming, something of the appearance of a rouged and painted corpse?

As might be expected Eleonora, too, is about to fall ill. And now she, who when the story opens, seems only to resemble Virginia, begins to betray a likeness to Elizabeth Arnold: "In stature she was tall, and slender even to fragility"; (Virginia, on the other hand, remained round in face to the end)

"the exceeding delicacy of her frame, as well as of the hues of her cheek, speaking painfully of the feeble tenure by which she held existence. The lilies of the valley were not more fair. With the nose, lips, and chin of the Greek Venus, she had the majestic forehead, the naturally-waving auburn hair, and the large luminous eyes of her kindred. Her beauty, nevertheless, was of that nature which leads the heart to wonder not less than to love. The grace of her motion was surely ethereal. Her fantastic step left no trace upon the asphodel—

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and I could not but dream as I gazed, enrapt, upon her alternate moods of melancholy and of mirth, that two separate souls were enshrined within her. So radical were the changes of countenance, that at one instant I imagined her possessed by some spirit of smiles, at another by some demon of tears.”¹

Let the reader recall here that Elizabeth Arnold’s profession had made her an adept in swift changes of expression and humour, which even extended, like Berenice,² to the colour of her hair. She, too, must have danced with the grace of a sylph.

But Eleonora “had seen that the finger of Death was upon her bosom—that, like the ephemeron, she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die”. Her only fear, and one which holds the terrors of the grave for her, is that when she is dead her lover may leave the valley and transfer “the love which now was so passionately her own to some maiden of the outer and everyday world”. She confesses this fear “one evening at twilight, by the banks of the River of Silence”. Whereupon, the hero tells us:

“then and there, I threw myself hurriedly at the feet of Eleonora, and offered up a vow, to herself and to Heaven, that I would never bind myself in marriage to any daughter of Earth—that I would in no manner prove recreant to her dear memory, or to the memory of the devout affection with which she had blessed me. And I called the Mighty Ruler of the Universe to witness the pious solemnity of my vow. And the curse which I invoked of *Him* and of her, a saint in Helusion, should I prove traitorous to that promise, involved a penalty the exceeding great horror of which will not permit me to make record of it here.”

And such, indeed, must have been the vow which, unknown to himself, the little Edgar made by his adored and dying mother’s bedside; a vow he was to keep all his life, despite his every effort to break it. Though he was to bestow his name on his little “sister” Virginia, no carnal union ever wedded him to any “daughter of Earth”.

Eleonora, like her prototype Elizabeth, dies of consumption in the flower of her youth, and vows she will ever watch over her faithful adorer (we are never told that they married) and give him “frequent indications of her presence”.

Wearily the years drag on. The despairing lover goes on living in the

¹ This passage from *The Gift*, the original version of the tale, was omitted in later versions. (Cf. *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 4, pp. 313-314.)

² See pages 215-7.

valley, "but a second change had come upon all things". The valley, which as we have seen is but the reflection, the counterfeit, of the lost love now, like her, takes on the dim hues of death.

"The star-shaped flowers shrank. . . The tints of the green carpet faded; and, one by one, the ruby-red asphodels withered away; and there sprang up, in place of them, ten by ten, dark eye-like violets. . . And Life departed from our paths. . ."

The birds fly away, the gold and silver fish swim out of the valley and the stream relapses into "the solemnity of its original silence".

"Yet the promises of Eleonora were not forgotten." Continually she manifests herself to the mourner, in breezes, perfumes, sighs and murmurs on the air. In his heart, however, the void remains unfilled and he yearns for the love which before had filled it to overflowing. At length, he who had worshipped Eleonora, leaves the Valley for the world.

At the court of the strange city in which he now finds himself, he clings to his vow despite a thousand temptations. But then, the manifestations cease, by which Eleonora made herself felt:

" . . for there came from some far, far distant and unknown land, into the gay court of the king I served, a maiden to whose beauty my whole recreant heart yielded at once".

"I looked down into the blue depths of her meaning eyes, and I thought only of them, and of her. Oh, lovely was the lady Ermengarde! and in that knowledge I had room for none other. Oh, glorious was the wavy flow of her auburn tresses! and I clasped them in a transport of joy to my bosom. And I found rapture in the fantastic grace of her step—and there was a wild delirium in the love I bore her when I started to see upon her countenance the identical transition from tears to smiles that I had wondered at in the long-lost Eleonora."¹

"I wedded;—nor dreaded the curse I had invoked; and its bitterness was not visited upon me." On the contrary "once—but once again in the silence of the night, there came through my lattice the soft sighs which had forsaken me; and they modelled themselves into familiar and sweet voice, saying: 'Sleep in peace!—for the Spirit of Love reigneth and ruleth, and, in taking to thy passionate heart her who is Ermengarde, thou art absolved, for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven, of thy vows unto Eleonora'".

These "reasons" are evidently the re-embodiment of Eleonora as Ermengarde. Like Rider Haggard's *She*, *Eleonora* is a tale of transference. Though, in the first version of the tale (that published in *The Gift*),

¹ This passage, also, occurs only in the first version of the tale. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 4, p. 315.)

Ermengarde was "fair-haired" which, as in Rowena's case, in Poe's mind stood for infidelity, as did also her blue eyes, in the second suppressed passage we quote, Poe ultimately endows her with Eleonora's "auburn" hair. Ligeia's black, and Rowena's fair hair, merge into a single colour, while that of Eleonora and Ermengarde are modified towards one colour, until both finally emerge with "auburn" hair. The two women have the same hair, the same slender figure, the same swift alternations of laughter and tears and the same unique soul.

Baudelaire, since he was not a psycho-analyst, could not suspect that the original love to which Poe was to be ever faithful, might be the mother he had lost at three. In a final note to his translation of *Eleonora* (*Histoires extraordinaires*), he tells us that the tale doubtless reflects Poe's scruples about setting Mrs. Whitman in Virginia's place. "I do not wish," he says,

"to take for beacons the glimmers of light that sometimes intoxicate the biographer, but it may be useful to point out that Poe had married the only daughter of his mother's¹ sister and that, after the death of this dearly-loved wife he, for a time, entertained thoughts of remarriage. Many poets have pursued the image of one and the same woman through many relations. This presumption of one single, abiding soul in different bodies, may serve as exculpation for a conscience which fears to prove unfaithful to a memory it cherishes. The sudden breaking off of the newly proposed and almost accomplished marriage would even help to strengthen this theory. If we assume that Eleonora was written at a time (unknown to me) antecedent to Poe's project of remarriage, my remarks, nevertheless, point a useful moral. For the poet would seem, at first, to have thought this theory enough, then judged it inadequate to outweigh his scruples."²

¹ An interesting and significant error on Baudelaire's part.

² ("Je ne veux pas attribuer trop de lumière aux lueurs qui font quelquefois l'ivresse des biographes. Cependant, il ne me paraît pas inutile d'observer que Poe avait épousé la fille unique de la sœur de sa mère, et qu'après la mort de cette femme très aimée, il songea pendant quelque temps à se remarier. Maint poète a souvent poursuivi, dans diverses liaisons, l'image d'une femme unique. Cette supposition d'une âme permanente sous différents corps peut apparaître comme le plaidoyer d'une conscience qui craint de se trouver infidèle à une mémoire chère. La brusque rupture du nouveau mariage projeté et presque conclu servirait même à fortifier cette hypothèse. En supposant que la date de la composition d'Éléonora, que j'ignore, soit antérieure à ce projet de nouveau mariage, mon observation n'en garde pas moins une valeur morale considérable. Le poète, en ce cas, se serait cru d'abord autorisé par sa théorie favorite, puis l'aurait jugée insuffisante pour calmer ses scrupules.")

Eleonora

Actually, the writing of *Eleonora* did considerably antedate Poe's plan of marrying Mrs. Whitman, and even his first great flame for Mrs. Osgood. But Baudelaire is right in saying that his remarks point a "useful moral", although he makes Poe appear altogether too rational in his weighing of scruples. For *Eleonora*, as it were, treats of infidelity in general. Though Eleonora is a composite of both Virginia and Elizabeth Arnold, Ermengarde represents an infidelity to each. Ermengarde, again, stands for Virginia, if Eleonora stands for Elizabeth. But if Eleonora is Elizabeth, Ermengarde then becomes the "Saratoga lady" and all those other temptations, unknown to us, which Poe may have harboured in his soul to be embodied later in his Frances Osgoods and Helen Whitmans. Like all dreams dreamed by men, the tale of *Eleonora* is both a chronicle of the past and a sort of prophecy of the future, in the manner in which it reveals the dreamer's nature and desires, which condition his future. As with dreams, again, the tale was called forth by some specific event—doubtless Virginia's first hæmoptysis, or possibly her palpable decline in health, with its warning of an imminent time when her place would be as vacant as was his cherished mother's, when he was a child. Like the orphaned boy at Richmond, or the despairing lover in the "Valley of the Many-Colored Grass", he saw that his bereavement would leave him, once more, with that same sense of loss, that same yearning for comfort. Once more the ardent longing for love would awake and, with it, the conflict between fidelity to a cherished memory and love of a new object in which the "abiding soul" would dwell under a changed exterior. But this conflict he was not to resolve so successfully in his life, as in the story of *Eleonora*, which so supremely expresses the phantasy of wish-fulfilment and reconciliation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Oval Portrait¹

The Oval Portrait, like *Eleonora*, was published in 1842 and, like it, the story must have been influenced by Virginia's declining health.

Once more the hero of the tale is an opium addict. As in *Berenice*, however, Poe suppresses all reference to opium in his last version of this tale (published in the *Broadway Journal*). These changes might well indicate Poe's ambivalence to the drug, his alternating impulses towards and from it. Be that as it may, the hero of this tale is attacked by brigands while on a journey, and takes refuge in an abandoned chateau in the Apennines, whose door he forces as Ethelred forced the door of the hermit's cell in *The Mad Trist*. Feverish and unable to sleep, he swallows a piece of the lump of opium he carries about.

Whereupon, the phantasmagoria with which Poe must have been so familiar, begin to unfold. The traveller has established himself for the night in a room in a remote turret, the walls of which, broken by many nooks and recesses, are

"hung with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and multiform armorial trophies, together with an unusually great number of very spirited modern paintings in frames of rich golden arabesque".

The hero, now under the effect of the opium he has taken, gazes upon them with deep interest, and then eagerly reads a small volume "found upon the pillow . . . which purported to criticise and describe them".

But then he alters the position of the candelabrum by his bedside, thereby throwing the light into a hitherto unilluminated corner of the room where hung

¹ *The Oval Portrait*: *Graham's Magazine*, April 1842; *Broadway Journal*, I, 17. In the first version (*Graham's Magazine*) this story was entitled *Life in Death*.

The Oval Portrait

"the portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood . . . a mere head and shoulders. . . The arms, the bosom and even the ends of the radiant hair, melted imperceptibly into the vague yet deep shadow which formed the back-ground of the whole. The frame was oval . . ."

in fact, like the miniature of Elizabeth Arnold. The hero gazes upon the portrait with mingled fascination and awe. At length, satisfied with having discovered,

"the true secret of its effect, I fell back within the bed. I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute *life-likeness* of expression. . ."

Life itself was present in the painting, in the dead woman, and thus, again, we find that Life-in-Death which is the appanage of all Poe's heroines. Not without reason, then, was this story—*The Oval Portrait*—in which the medallion of Elizabeth Arnold once more comes to life, originally entitled *Life in Death*.

Now the hero returns the candelabrum to its place and seeks the description of the portrait in his little volume. There he finds "the vague and quaint words which follow":—

"She was a maiden of rarest beauty, and not more lovely than full of glee. And evil was the hour when she saw, and loved, and wedded the painter. He, passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art; she a maiden . . . loving and cherishing all things, hating only the Art which was her rival. . . It was thus a terrible thing for this lady to hear the painter speak of his desire to pourtray even his young bride. But she was humble and obedient, and sat meekly for many weeks in the dark high turret-chamber where the light dripped upon the pale canvas only from overhead. But he, the painter, took glory in his work . . . so that he *would* not see that the light which fell so ghastlily in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him. Yet she smiled on and still on. . . But at length, as the labor drew nearer to its conclusion, there were admitted none into the turret; for the painter had grown wild with the ardor of his work, and turned his eyes from the canvas rarely, even to regard the countenance of his wife. And he *would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate beside him. And when many weeks had passed, and but little remained to do, save one brush upon the mouth and one tint upon the eye, the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp. And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment, the painter

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stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next, while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, "This is indeed *Life* itself!" turned suddenly to regard his beloved:—"She was dead!"

We shall have no difficulty in recognizing in this artist of genius, mad, obsessed and, in his way sadistic, one more representation of Poe. This story of the artist and his model, symbolically expressed, is that of Poe the artist, and his relation to his art. Among Poe's works, *The Oval Portrait* holds the position, though in miniature, of the great fresco of *The Mastersingers* in those of Wagner.

What is it that Poe, in *The Oval Portrait*, confesses? It is that, to achieve those sombre masterpieces in which his Madelines, Ligeias, Berenices, smile ever more wanly to our eyes, he has had to "draw" the colour and life "from the cheeks" of a dying woman. In order that Poe might become the kind of artist he was, a woman had first to die. In this story, the note of remorse, as regards the man, mingles with that of triumph; as regards the artist, it is as though the man in him felt responsible for the woman's death, since he thus relentlessly used her both for his pleasure and profit, as was dictated by his deepest wishes.

And, indeed, while *The Oval Portrait* was being written, a woman, in fact, was dying at Poe's side: the woman who served as the model for his picture-tales. The depth of the need for a model of this kind, was a main reason why he chose the little Virginia, marked out for phthisis, for his wife. Virginia instinctively adopted the poses he might need. And, just as a painter poses a living woman for Venus or The Virgin, although in his mind's-eye he reconstructs some ideal image from his past, so Poe, when in his tales he paints his dying Virginia's poses, always reproduces the great mother's image that gleams through. The only reason he chose Virginia for his model was because, with her young, dying body, she resembled Elizabeth: this he did much as a painter would choose a well-made woman for his Venus. And since, once upon a time, when he was small, a woman had to die that he might become Poe the writer so, later, was he irresistibly led to choose one who was doomed to a lingering death, to be the model for his canvases.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Assignment¹

OF all Poe's sinister heroes we have so far studied, Usher alone, though how fraught with vengeance and terror! achieves the phantasy of union with the beloved in death. Yet this was, in fact, one of the basic phantasies present in Poe's necrophilist unconscious. It is the theme of *Annabel Lee* and even of the verses *For Annie*. It is that of *The Oblong Box*, and is there so clearly expressed as to make its analysis unnecessary. It is also the theme of *The Assignment*.

The Assignment, at first entitled *The Visionary*, like *Berenice* and *Morella* belongs to *The Tales of the Folio Club* and thus to Poe's first prose writings. Doubtless he composed it under Mrs. Clemm's roof, inspired by the nearness of Virginia, his cousin.

In style, *The Assignment* is both pompous and romantic. "Ill-fated and mysterious man!"—so opens the tale—

"bewildered in the brilliancy of thine own imagination, and fallen in the flames of thine own youth! Again in fancy I behold thee! Once more thy form hath risen before me!—not—oh not as thou art—in the cold valley and shadow—but as thou *shouldst be*—squandering away a life of magnificent meditation in that city of dim visions, thine own Venice—"

Thus apostrophized, the hero of the tale—an Englishman, as we learn later—is set before us in true Byronic style, against such a background as that in which Childe Harold meets his Countess Guiccioli.

The narrator now begins his story:

¹*The Assignment*: first published as *The Visionary*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, July 1835; 1840 and later in the *Broadway Journal*, I, 23, as *The Assignment*, which text I quote from the *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2.

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"It was a night of unusual gloom. . . I was returning home from the Piazzetta, by way of the Grand Canal. But as my gondola arrived opposite the mouth of the canal San Marco, a female voice from its recesses broke suddenly upon the night, in one wild, hysterical, and long-continued shriek."

Thereupon, the startled gondolier lets fall his single oar and, as the gondola drifts slowly towards the Bridge of Sighs,

"a thousand flambeaux flashing from the windows and down the staircases of the Ducal Palace", turn "all at once that deep gloom into a livid and preternatural day".

"A child, slipping from the arms of its own mother, had fallen from an upper window of the lofty structure into the deep and dim canal. The quiet waters had closed placidly over their victim."

But, already, many a stout swimmer has plunged into the water after it, as a radiant figure appears on the black marble flagstones before the palace doors.

"It was the Marchesa Aphrodite—the adoration of all Venice—the gayest of the gay—the most lovely where all were beautiful—but still the young wife of the old and intriguing Mentoni, and the mother of that fair child, her first and only one," now deep beneath the waters of the canal.

"She stood alone. Her small, bare, and silvery feet gleamed in the black mirror of marble beneath her. Her hair, not as yet more than half loosened for the night from its ball-room array, clustered, amid a shower of diamonds, round and round her classical head, in curls like those of the young hyacinth. A snowy-white and gauze-like drapery seemed to be nearly the sole covering to her delicate form; but the mid-summer and midnight air was hot, sullen, and still, and no motion in the statue-like form itself, stirred even the folds of that raiment of very vapor which hung around it as the heavy marble hangs around the Niobe. Yet—strange to say!—her large lustrous eyes were not turned downwards upon that grave wherein her brightest hope lay buried—but riveted in a widely different direction! The prison of the Old Republic is, I think, the stateliest building in all Venice—but how could that lady gaze so fixedly upon it, when beneath her lay stifling her only child? Yon dark, gloomy niche, too, yawns right opposite her chamber window—what, then, *could* there be in its shadows . . . that the Marchesa di Mentoni had not wondered at a thousand times before?"

Meanwhile, her husband, a "Satyr-like figure" in gala dress, "*ennuyé*

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to the very death", stands on the steps above his wife and directs the rescue of his child while strumming a guitar.

All efforts, however, prove vain and the swimmers return to the steps exhausted. At that moment,

"from the interior of that dark niche which has been already mentioned as forming a part of the Old Republican prison . . . a figure muffled in a cloak, stepped out within reach of the light, and, pausing a moment upon the verge of the giddy descent, plunged headlong into the canal. As, in an instant afterwards, he stood with the still living and breathing child within his grasp, upon the marble flagstones by the side of the Marchesa, his cloak, heavy with the drenching water, became unfastened, and, falling in folds about his feet, discovered to the wonder-stricken spectators the graceful person of a very young man, with the sound of whose name the greater part of Europe was then ringing."

Again we are reminded of Byron, both by the young hero's European fame and by his prowess as a swimmer, which makes him think nothing of diving into the canal wrapped in a Spanish cloak!

"No word spoke the deliverer", as the stern father orders the child to be taken indoors. But the Marchesa is trembling, tears start to her "soft and almost liquid" eyes, she blushes from head to foot and her trembling hand presses the stranger's, as Mentoni re-enters his palace. Then, in a "singularly low" voice she bids the former adieu and, at the same time, murmurs these enigmatic words: "Thou hast conquered—one hour after sunrise—we shall meet—so let it be!" Is it a lover's assignment we thus surprise?

The narrator now puts his gondola at the stranger's disposal, and takes the opportunity to describe him in detail:

"In height he might have been below rather than above the medium size: although there were moments of intense passion when his frame actually *expanded* and belied the assertion. The light, almost slender symmetry of his figure, promised more of that ready activity which he evinced at the Bridge of Sighs, than of that Herculean strength which he has been known to wield without an effort, upon occasions of more dangerous emergency. With the mouth and chin of a deity—singular, wild, full, liquid eyes, whose shadows varied from pure hazel to intense and brilliant jet—and a profusion of curling, black hair, from which a forehead of unusual breadth gleamed forth at intervals all light and ivory—his were features than which I have seen none more classically regular, except, perhaps, the marble ones of the Emperor Commodus."

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Thus, the earlier suggestion of a likeness to Byron is deepened, though the Byronic mouth and chin and "classic features" are made to merge with Poe's own "singular eyes" and "forehead of unusual breadth". Both men were athletic and particularly good swimmers; both, too, had naturally curling hair. The stranger thus combines traits of Poe's "ego" and "ego-ideal". Byron was still the demi-god of the time and Poe, when writing *The Tales of the Folio Club*, gives abundant proof of his sensitiveness to this all-pervading influence. Worth mentioning is the fact that Thomas Sully, the uncle of Robert Sully, one of Poe's friends at fifteen, is said, somewhat later, to have painted a miniature of Poe, when beginning to be known, in a pose identical with one of the portraits of Byron; an event which doubtless much gratified Poe.¹

But whereas Byron would doubtless have begun by taking possession of the lady of his dreams before inviting her to accompany him to the next world, Poe's "stranger" sees love differently. He begins by inviting his chance friend, the narrator, to visit him at his palace "*very early the next morning*". The new acquaintance therefore arrives shortly after sunrise and is "made blind and dizzy with luxuriousness" as he gazes at the unparalleled splendour of the halls in which his host dwells. Gazing about, he cannot believe that "the wealth of any subject in Europe could have supplied the princely magnificence which burned and blazed around". The rooms are brilliantly lamp-lit and reek from "strange convolute censers": light streams in through crimson-tinted glass; tapestries of gold and silver abound; as do the choicest works of art from every source and period. Perfumes and music fill the air, though no musicians can be seen. The stranger, whose air of exhaustion betrays a sleepless night, welcomes his visitor—with rare tact, it must be confessed!—by jeering at the impression this magnificence obviously makes. With the exception of his valet and one other person, he tells him, no other being has ever crossed the threshold of these "imperial precincts". An exalted conversation follows on life and art in which, at times, his host falls into a reverie. During one such pause the visitor takes up, from a divan, a copy of Politian's tragedy, *Orfeo*, in which he finds a marked passage:

"a passage of the most heart-stirring excitement—a passage which, although tainted with impurity, no man shall read without a thrill of novel emotion—no woman without a sigh. The whole page was blotted with fresh tears. . .".

¹ *Israfel*, p. 98: Hervey Allen claims to know the whereabouts of this portrait though not at liberty to state where.

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On the opposite "interleaf", in a hand which the reader has difficulty in recognizing as his host's, he reads the following lines:¹

"Thou wast that all to me, love,
For which my soul did pine—
A green isle in the sea, love,
A fountain and a shrine,
All wreathed in fairy fruits and flowers,
And all the flowers were mine.

Ah, dream too bright to last!
Ah, starry Hope that didst arise
But to be overcast!
A voice from out the Future cries
"Onward!"—but o'er the Past
(Dim gulf!) my spirit hovering lies,
Mute—motionless—aghast!

For alas! alas! with me
The light of life is o'er!
"No more—no more—no more—"
(Such language holds the solemn sea
To the sands upon the shore,)
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,
Or the stricken eagle soar!

Now all my hours are trances;
And all my nightly dreams
Are where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams—
In what ethereal dances—
By what Italian streams!

Alas! for that accursed time
They bore thee o'er the billow,
From Love to titled age and crime
And an unholy pillow!—
From me, and from our misty clime,
Where weeps the silver willow!"

¹ *To One in Paradise*. When published apart from the tale, the poem lacked the last stanza, and, in the stanza before the last, read "eternal streams" for "Italian streams".

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These lines, written in English, confirm the narrator in his opinion, based on the general rumour, that the stranger is an Englishman "not only by birth, but in education".

The stranger, then, to the wondering eyes of his guest, unveils a full-length portrait of the Marchesa Aphrodite. The figure is ethereally graceful, but a fitful melancholy lurks in her smile and her left hand points downwards to a curiously fashioned vase. As the visitor turns from the painting to his host, a passage from Chapman comes to his mind:

"He is up
There like a Roman statue! He will stand
Till Death hath made him marble!"

"'Come!'" says the stranger at length, "turning towards a table of richly enamelled and massive silver, upon which were a few goblets fantastically stained, together with two large Etruscan vases, fashioned in the same extraordinary model as that in the foreground of the portrait, and filled with what I supposed to be Johannisberger. 'Come!' he said abruptly, 'let us drink! It is early—but let us drink. It is *indeed* early,' he continued, musingly, as a cherub with a heavy golden hammer, made the apartment ring with the first hour after sunrise—'It is *indeed* early, but what matters it? let us drink! Let us pour out an offering to yon solemn sun which these gaudy lamps and censers are so eager to subdue!' And, having made me pledge him in a bumper, he swallowed in rapid succession several goblets of the wine."

Resuming the conversation, the stranger finally declares:

"Like these arabesque censers, my spirit is writhing in fire, and the delirium of this scene is fashioning me for the wilder visions of that land of real dreams whither I am now rapidly departing".

He pauses, and for a few moments appears to be listening to some sound audible to himself alone. Then, raising his eyes to heaven, he utters these lines:

*"Stay for me there! I will not fail
To meet thee in that hollow vale".*

"In the next instant, confessing the power of the wine, he threw himself at full length upon an ottoman."

At that moment, feet are heard on the stair, someone knocks at the door and a page of Mentoni's household bursts in, faltering: "'My mistress! . . . oh beautiful Aphrodite!'".

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The friend rushes to the divan and strives to arouse the sleeper. It is too late; "his limbs were rigid—his lips were livid—his lately beaming eyes were riveted in *death*". On the table, at his side, lies "a cracked and blackened goblet". The "consciousness of the entire and terrible truth", concludes the narrator, "flashed suddenly over my soul"

* * *

Such, in substance, is this romantic tale of love and poison, which, in absurdity, rivals the conclusion of *Hernani*.

Poe's lovers do not even die together, but are content with a sort of telepathic union, in death, by poison. But whereas in *Hernani*, the fulfilment of a vow, in some degree, as it were, justifies the mutual suicide of Doña Sol and her husband, here the lovers seem deliberately to choose this simultaneous but divided death as the most perfect form of union. Whatever the difficulties that beset their meetings and however jealous the husband might be, the stranger has already confessed that the Marchesa has visited him: indeed, it would seem that, for this supreme assignation, she might once more have left her palace. Poe, then, must clearly have elected to have them die simultaneously, but apart.

We have already seen that the hero is Poe, or rather his "ego" keyed to the Byronic scale that was then the fashion. But who served as model for the Marchesa? The most obvious likeness that comes to mind is the Helen of Poe's boyhood and, indeed, Aphrodite here bears many similar touches. Like Mrs. Stanard she has a "classical" head (cf. Helen's "classic face"), "hyacinth hair" and, like her, is "statue-like". Indeed, she is so lovely that she seems inanimate, and thus, in her way, reminds us of death.¹

But it is not only Helen whom Aphrodite resembles. Several of Poe's early loves are also condensed here, as are often the composite beings of our dreams. And the origins of these different characteristics may be unravelled.

The poem in the tale appears to be part of the series of poems addressed to Elmira. Not without reason does the last stanza—omitted when Poe published the poem apart—refer to "titled age and crime", and an "unholy pillow". Mr. Shelton, Poe's wealthy rival, had indeed borne Elmira away, if not to "Italian streams", at least to an "unholy pillow". Little wonder, then, that Edgar felt himself the "thunder-blasted tree", or "stricken eagle", that would never again soar.

¹ Earlier, there is also mention of a *niche*, in which the child's rescuer first appears. And it was in a *window-niche* that Helen stands, statue-like, in *To Helen*.

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The Marchese Mentoni is also a composite figure, not merely representative of Mr. Shelton. Desiccated and aged, may he not also suggest Judge Stanard who, twelve or thirteen years older than his wife, was well over forty when Edgar first met his Helen.¹ To a boy of fourteen or fifteen, in love with a young woman, a husband over forty would naturally appear "old", especially when the boy is a poet and the husband a hardly romantic judge. Judge Stanard might well have been somewhat dry and matter-of-fact, unlike his romantic young wife who, when Poe was reading his first poems to her, was doubtless already tinged with incipient madness.

Naturally, too, the harsh and severe figure of John Allan would have gone to the making of Mentoni, though but four years older than his wife.² But John Allan had separated Edgar from his "Ma" as the Marchese separates these lovers. Both, to the enamoured son, represent that eternal obstacle, the father. And the stranger's fabulous wealth, the unimaginable luxury of his surroundings, are doubtless his mirrored nostalgia for John Allan's fortune, which he had hoped for and lost. Now, in his wish-phantasy, it is endowed on his Byronic ego-ideal. Let us note, in passing, that Poe was to draw his other phantasies of sumptuous interiors (cf. *The Philosophy of Furniture*) from the same source; as also the wealth of gold and precious stones that glitter in *The Gold Bug*.

And the child? How are we to interpret the lover's rescue of his beloved's child only a few hours before they are united in death? The situation is manifestly absurd, for here we have a petrified mother, a veritable Niobe of despair, whose only child has slipped from her arms into a canal and, when it is saved, her husband's brutality prevents her from smothering it with kisses; whereupon the same doting mother, so shattered by her babe's peril and deliverance, promptly decides to reward the stranger's courage by dying herself, with him, the next dawn, and thus abandons the child to its cruel father, forever.

This would be merely silly, but for the light that psycho-analysis can throw. We learn, however, when analysing dreams, to pass beyond the manifest content and probe to the latent significance. It so happens that the latent significance of rescuing a child from drowning is universally

¹ Hervey Allen quotes their epitaphs (*Israel*, p. 109). The Judge was born in 1781; his wife died in 1824 at 30.

² According to *Israel*, John Allan was born in 1780, Frances Valentine in 1784.

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the same,¹ and we can therefore dispense with our author's actual association of ideas. In ordinary dreams, as in all human mythology, the rescue of a child from water is equivalent to bringing it to birth. When the hero of this tale rescues the drowning child, and returns it to its mother, we must interpret this as his *giving her, physically, a real child*.

It is probable that Poe, given his inhibitions, so far as consciousness went, might well have imagined the Marchesa's visit to her lover's apartments purely platonic. It would have seemed finer, nobler, to him thus. Nevertheless, the passage from *Orfeo*, stained by the stranger's tears, is described as "tainted with impurity". The latent significance, therefore, of this tale, in the unconscious, is that the carnal union of the lovers did take place, and that theirs is this child that was born of the waters. The foundation of this story is, therefore, a phantasy of love consummated between the stranger Byron-Poe and the Marchesa Elmira-Helen-Frances; in fact, an Œdipus phantasy of incest between mother and son.

There were, however, specific events in Poe's youth which well prefigured the form this tale was to take. As we know, Edgar was an excellent swimmer. At fourteen or fifteen (that is, when he was devoted to Helen) emulating his hero Byron, he swam the James River, a feat on which he was to pride himself throughout life. In a letter to White, dated May, 1835, he thus relates the exploit:

"The writer seems to compare my swim with that of Lord Byron, whereas there can be no comparison between them. Any swimmer 'in the falls' in my days, would have swum the Hellespont, and thought nothing of the matter. I swam from Ludlow's wharf to Warwick (six miles), in a hot June sun, against one of the strongest tides ever known in the river. It would have been a feat comparatively easy to swim twenty miles in still water. I would not think much of attempting to swim the British Channel from Dover to Calais."²

It will be recalled that, at the time, his teacher, William Burke, followed in a boat, and some of his schoolmates along the bank. Among them were Robert H. Cabell and Robert C. Stanard, the latter the son of his adored Helen, who is said to have got wet through and plastered with mud.³ Young Stanard was five years younger than Poe, whom he worshipped, and who had taken him under his wing.

¹ Cf. Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 40, 1913, translated from *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, Leipzig and Vienna, Deuticke, 1908.

² *Israfel*, p. 105, quoting the *Southern Literary Messenger* and Ingram.

³ *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106, based on the Memoirs of John C. Stanard.

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Another boy who fell under the brilliant Edgar's spell, was the son of John Allan's partner, later to become Colonel Ellis. "No boy ever had a greater influence over me than he had", Ellis wrote later and tells how Edgar, one day, teaching him to swim, threw him into the water. The younger boy was about to drown when his teacher plunged to his rescue.¹ Thus, two boys to whom he had played a half-protective, half-paternal part, had been eye-witnesses of his prowess. One he had actually saved from drowning, the other was the son of the woman he loved. Thus, an actual foundation appears for the rescue-phantasy of the beloved's son with which *The Assignment* opens. To these memories, and their influence, there linked themselves, risen from the unconscious, the buried Œdipus wish to replace the father and beget the mother with child: thus this story came into being.

The obvious absurdity of this tale, especially striking in that the devoted mother abandons her rescued child in order to die with her lover, evidently expresses, in the latent content of the tale, like absurdity in dreams, Poe's own judgment of the matter. The absurd fashion in which the stranger plunges into the canal in his cloak—which would, in fact, have rendered him "impotent" to swim, must have a similar significance. It is as though Poe were virtually saying: "Absurd to think I could have a child by my mother. We shall never be able to unite, save in death." And here we begin to see that a fourth woman has contributed to the formation of the Marchesa Aphrodite. For all her statuesque and "Helen"-esque air, this Marchesa—named after the great maternal goddess herself born of the sea—forms no exception to the rule and, like Poe's other heroines, is modelled in part upon another "ethereal" figure, Elizabeth Arnold. She, too, dressed ready for the stage, in "gauze-like drapery", must often have dazzled her little son. Not without reason does the first version of the tale give the Marchesa, like the lady in *The Oval Portrait*, "a nose like those delicate creations of the mind to be found only in the medallions of the Hebrews".² To Poe, the original of all "medallions" was his miniature of his mother—her only portrait he had. The fact that he suppressed this passage, in the version published in 1840, can only emphasize its confession of his mother-fixation.

Though, however, the poem in the stranger's hand, which was inserted in the *Orfeo*, sprang from regret for Elmira's loss, it was as much inspired by mourning for that "one in Paradise", to whom *To One in Paradise*, when

¹ Harrison, in his biographical study of Poe, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 24.

² *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 346.

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published apart, was addressed. The composite Eurydice built up from features of both Frances and Helen, was first and ever his primal model: the cherished mother he had lost as a child. With good reason, therefore, were "Italian streams" changed to "eternal streams" in the version he separately published and the abode of her he mourned, transferred from earth to heaven.

Now it was Edgar's mother who, in giving birth to Rosalie at Norfolk, in December 1810, revealed to him the mystery of birth. The father, David Poe, was away. Were there grounds for the rumour which cast doubt on Rosalie's legitimacy? All we can say is that if Elizabeth Arnold had more than a passing love affair, if another man took David Poe's place in the home he had left, the fact would have been known and more than mere doubt would have clouded the virtue of the consumptive actress. No, when Rosalie was born, when the two children accompanied their mother to Charleston, Edgar must have found himself in the proud position of sole male, his Œdipal wishes triumphantly gratified. Also, the jealousy he would feel for his baby sister, who had robbed him of part of his mother's caresses, might well combine with the unconscious phantasy that she was given to them both, as though to husband and wife, he now in place of the absent father. All this, indeed, would never have been formulated in so young a mind, but its elements were laid down by his situation, to be elaborated in the developing psyche of the growing child.

Nevertheless, in the tale, the composite Edgar-Stranger is not permitted to survive. Not only does he carry out his Œdipal wish to beget his mother with child, symbolised in his rescue of Aphrodite's baby, but also he gains his wish for union with her in death. Here the union (symbolized by the lovers' simultaneous death) *follows*, instead of preceding, the birth of the child. The time element, however, is a product of consciousness, and the unconscious cares little for chronological sequence. That death is often a symbol of sexual union and brings its satisfaction and reward, we see from the suicide of so many thwarted lovers, who choose to die together rather than abscond, even when no real obstacle prevents them.

In this story, however, death is also the punishment inflicted on mother and son for the Œdipal incest-crime. It is the stern figure of the aged husband who, at the head of the stairs, towers over his possession, the statue-like Aphrodite: it is he who, from afar, decrees the death of the lovers. So too, do Doña Sol and Hernani drink poison as, in the distance, Don Ruy Gomez sounds his horn: (Don Ruy, the father-figure in excelsis, for Doña Sol has been his ward!). Victor Hugo—more direct and less

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repressed than Poe—can permit his sinister greybeard to visit death on the lovers, Doña Sol standing to Hernani as both mother and sister. But Poe makes the Marchese exert his influence from afar and, so to speak, merely by existing; for it is only his existence which hinders the earthly union of the lovers. The sole witness of the final tragedy is the *sun*.

But the sun, in myths, is the universal father. His eye, like God's, is omnipresent, inescapable. Thus, the lovers are still watched by the father in his avenging role. In vain the lamps and fantastic censers—symbols of their owner, the "stranger" or son—strive with their brilliance to "subdue the solemn sun". The sun will at length be victorious and it is to it, as to Ruy Gomez, that the sacrifice of both young lives will be made.

Thus Poe, like Hugo, unwittingly reproduces the archaic drama which, to-day, in civilized peoples, only survives deep in the unconscious but which, in prehistoric times, must often have taken place in dark primeval forests—the murder, by the avenging father, of the son who has possessed himself of one of the father's women; mother or sister. A clue to the crime for which punishment is inflicted, may be seen in the manner of the chosen death: that by poison. For the convulsions that result from poison, often, in the unconscious, stand for the sex orgasm. Thus the Marchesa and the stranger, as perfect lovers, at the same moment and together, experience the ultimate, supreme orgasm.

Doubtless, the fact that they are condemned to experience this final and simultaneous "long-distance" orgasm, is due to the strength of Poe's sex repressions, he himself being unconsciously horrified by the boldness of this unconscious incest-phantasy.

CHAPTER XXX

Metzengerstein¹

Metzengerstein will complete our analysis of the series which we have called Tales of the "Live-in-Death" Mother. Although the mother appears with the attributes of Life-in-Death in other of Poe's tales, here we concern ourselves only with those in which this aspect is the central theme.

The first version of *Metzengerstein*, one of *The Tales of the Folio Club*, in addition to the title, carried the note, *In Imitation of the German*. Despite this declaration, the tale proves, yet again, how impossible it is for genius to copy a set model. Whenever a person's complexes can be transmuted into art (the sole distinguishing mark of the true artist), these idiosyncratic complexes vitalize and colour everything he creates. Poe, it is true, developed in an atmosphere of romanticism, of mist-wreathed Teutonic castles haunted by ladies in white, and must naturally have read Ann Radcliffe and other works of the kind. In the same way, phthisis was the "poetic" and fashionable illness of his time. All this, however, would never have sufficed to make Poe, had Elizabeth Arnold not died in a Richmond garret, on a December night in 1811, with her little son present.

I do not know whether *Metzengerstein* has its original in German, but none but Poe could have written the version he gives.

Metzengerstein is set in Hungary, at some time in the past, when there existed a "hidden belief in the doctrines of the Metempsychosis". The two noble houses of Metzengerstein and Berlifitzing, whose estates adjoin, have been at variance for centuries. According to an ancient prophecy

"A lofty name shall have a fearful fall when, as the rider over his horse, the mortality of Metzengerstein shall triumph over the immortality of Berlifitzing".

¹ *Metzengerstein*: *Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1836; 1840; Griswold.

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The lords of Berlitzing, less ancient and wealthy than the rival Metzengersteins, tremble at this prediction. Furthermore, "Wilhelm, Count Berlitzing, although loftily descended," is

"at the epoch of this narrative, an infirm and doting old man, remarkable for nothing but an inordinate and inveterate personal antipathy to the family of his rival, and so passionate a love of horses, and of hunting, that neither bodily infirmity, great age, nor mental incapacity, prevented his daily participation in the dangers of the chase".

His rival, "Frederick, Baron Metzengerstein", is, however, "not yet of age. His father, the Minister G—, died young. His mother, the Lady Mary, followed him quickly". Such, too, had been the fate of Poe's parents.

Here a passage, probably suppressed by Poe and found in the final version published by Griswold after Poe's death, deserves our attention. Like the passages quoted from *Berenice*, *Eleonora* and *The Oval Portrait*, suppressed by Poe in the final *Broadway Journal* versions issued in 1845, these lines are reminiscent of those forgotten portions of dreams which, in disjointed fragments, rise to consciousness after the dream has been related. All analysts know that such dream fragments are generally important and that they are suppressed in the manifest dream, for a time, by the censor, precisely because they are especially revealing and important for the latent significance of the dream. And now, of what do these passages, suppressed by Poe, speak: passages we here restore? In *Berenice*, it is the "dead" woman, alive in her coffin, and the use of opium, that are suppressed; in *Eleonora*, it is the description of the woman; in *The Oval Portrait*, it is the circumstantial confession of the use of opium and, in *Metzengerstein*, as we shall see, it is another significant clue to comprehending his dream tale that Poe seems to wish to hide. Naturally, he himself would not be conscious of this intent, any more than the dreamer who "forgets" some part of his dream. Doubtless, he would think these omissions dictated by æsthetic considerations and the need for concision: none the less do we see that the restoration of the suppressed passages, in each case, throws strange and unexpected light on the latent meaning of the tale.

So it is with the passage suppressed in *Metzengerstein*:

"The beautiful Lady Mary! How could she die?—and of consumption! But it is a path I have prayed to follow. I would wish all I love to perish of that gentle disease. How glorious! to depart in the hey-day of the young blood—the heart all passion—the imagination all fire—

amid the remembrances of happier days—in the fall of the year—and so be buried up forever in the gorgeous autumnal leaves! Thus died the Lady Mary. The young Baron Frederick stood without a living relative by the coffin of his dead mother. He placed his hand upon her placid forehead.”

So too, must another boy have once wished to do, or done. Yet, while Edgar never ceased to mourn his mother, Frederick Metzengerstein behaves with heartless ferocity. *He* is no longer three!

“No shudder came over his delicate frame—no sigh from his flinty bosom. Heartless, self-willed, and impetuous from his childhood, he had reached the age of which I speak” (eighteen) “through a career of unfeeling, wanton, and reckless dissipation; and a barrier had long since arisen in the channel of all holy thoughts and gentle recollections.”¹

Such was Frederick’s character, which part of Poe—for all his eternal sense of bereavement—must unconsciously have wished to resemble. This it was which had permitted him to rebel against paternal authority and even his mother fixation, by forever abandoning the home of John and Frances Allan after his “career of . . . dissipation” at the University of Virginia, “unfeeling, wanton, and reckless” and, like Frederick, eighteen.

Such efforts at liberation, however, never entirely succeed in severing the bonds that bind us to, and make us dependent on, those who dominated our childhood: those we then loved and hated.

Frederick-Edgar, having succeeded to his father’s vast possessions, immediately after the latter’s death,

“for the space of three days . . . out-heroded Herod, and fairly surpassed the expectations of his most enthusiastic admirers”.

Poe does not say whether Frederick’s mother, who died shortly after her husband, was dead at this time—a point worthy of note. Be that as it may, his father’s death liberates Frederick’s most ferocious instincts:

“Shameful debaucheries—flagrant treacheries—unheard-of atrocities—gave his trembling vassals quickly to understand that no servile submission on their part—no punctilios of conscience on his own—were thenceforward to prove any security against the remorseless fangs of a petty Caligula”

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, p. 371.

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Thus must Poe also have been, in his unconscious, though not in deed, as the sadism, so apparent in his tales, well shows.

Now, Frederick worthily crowns his exploits:

"On the night of the fourth day, the stables of the Castle Berlifitzing were discovered to be on fire; and the unanimous opinion of the neighbourhood added the crime of the incendiary to the already heinous list of the Baron's misdemeanors and enormities".

But who is Berlifitzing, the "doting old man", remarkable only for his inveterate antipathy to his hereditary rivals, and his passionate love of horses and hunting—a love so great that "neither bodily infirmity, great age, nor mental incapacity prevented his daily participation in the dangers of the chase". To Poe's unconscious, Berlifitzing could have represented none other than John Allan. Like the Count, he too was "bodily infirm", and had his first attack of dropsy when only forty, *i.e.*, in 1820, when in England with his family and Edgar. He, too, in the young rebel's eyes, had an "inordinate and inveterate personal antipathy" to Edgar's family and he, too, in spite of the physical infirmities, "great age" and "mental incapacity" which the young Edgar, in his hatred, would have wished to bestow, retained his full physical and intellectual vigour and, like Berlifitzing, kept to the end his passion for horses and the symbolic "chase": a passion which, in the unconscious, connotes women and the sex-act. Though the widower of Frances Allan, had he not now, at fifty, just remarried a young wife, as well as fathered twins on a Mrs. Wills,¹ as his will showed, not to mention other bastards born in Frances's lifetime? And when he died at fifty-four, did he not, despite his infirmities, leave two children of his own by this marriage, and his wife pregnant with a third? Thus, despite his dropsy, the old man was "riding" to within a few months of his death, undeterred by the "dangers of the chase".

Furthermore, his stables catch fire. Fire, in the unconscious, is the classic symbol of urethral erotism (is it not commonly held that children who play with fire will wet the bed at night?) possibly because water—like urine—extinguishes its opposite, fire, thus establishing association by contrast: more probably, however, it is because the organ which passes urine may also burn with the "fire" of desire, thus establishing association by proximity. The bed-wetting of childhood is, as we know, always associated with, or the substitute for, infantile masturbation:

¹ *Israfel*, p. 868.

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thus its "fire" summons "water". And a usual sexual theory of children, in their ignorance of semen, is that men fecundate women by urinating into or on them. It need not surprise us, therefore, that Poe's unconscious should thus express the punishment visited upon the old Allan-Berlitzing, in terms of infantile urethral erotism.

Meanwhile the Berlitzing stables blaze, during which the "young nobleman" sits "apparently buried in meditation, in a vast and desolate upper apartment of the family palace of Metzengerstein". This chamber is hung with tapestries.

"*There*, the dark, tall statures of the Princes Metzengerstein—their muscular war-couriers plunging over the carcasses of fallen foes—startled the steadiest nerves with their vigorous expression: and *here*, again, the voluptuous and swan-like figures of the dames of days gone by, floated away in the mazes of an unreal dance to the strains of imaginary melody."

Thus, the tapestries depict mounted warriors in combat and gentle, ethereal women.

"But as the Baron listened, or affected to listen, to the gradually increasing uproar in the stables of Berlitzing—or perhaps pondered upon some more novel, some more decided act of audacity—his eyes were turned unwittingly to the figure of an enormous, and unnaturally colored horse, represented in the tapestry as belonging to a Saracen ancestor of the family of his rival. The horse itself, in the fore-ground of the design, stood motionless and statue-like—while, farther back, its discomfited rider perished by the dagger of a Metzengerstein."

This tapestry seems to exert a strange influence on Frederick, who cannot tear his eyes from it, although it arouses an

"overwhelming anxiety which appeared falling like a pall upon his senses. . . But the tumult without becoming suddenly more violent, with a compulsory exertion he diverted his attention to the glare of ruddy light thrown full by the flaming stables upon the windows of the apartment.

"The action, however, was but momentary; his gaze returned mechanically to the wall. To his extreme horror and astonishment, the head of the gigantic steed had, in the meantime, altered its position. The neck of the animal, before arched, as if in compassion; over the prostrate body of its lord, was now extended, at full length, in the direction of the Baron. The eyes, before invisible, now wore an energetic and human expression, while they gleamed with a fiery and

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unusual red; and the distended lips of the apparently enraged horse left in full view his sepulchral and disgusting teeth."

Thus in the tapestry, Life returns into Death, as it returned into Rowena's body; as it persists in the bodies of Berenice and Madeline, or in the inanimate canvas of *The Oval Portrait*. But it is when the pictured horse bares its teeth—the "sepulchral teeth" of Berenice and Rowena, that its identity becomes clear. For the creature from whose back the mounted ancestor of the Berlifitzings is unhorsed by the standing ancestor of the Metzengersteins, is once more an image of the mother, but now presented in the primitive unchanged totemic guise that remains preserved in the unconscious. The monstrous horse of this Berlifitzing represents a condensation of the "mothers" John Allan "mounted" and of Poe's own mother, Elizabeth Arnold: she of the sepulchral teeth. For though, to Poe, the father's figure would ever be stamped with the strong traits of his second father John Allan, to the gradual occlusion of his real father David Poe, the mother's face, on the other hand, would immutably wear the sepulchral features of his actual mother. It was upon this, that the images of those other "mothers" he was to love so passionately were superimposed, from Frances Allan to Virginia and those after her.

If, however, in this instance, he no longer represents the mother as one of the white-robed, ethereal ladies such as float on the tapestries, nor again, as returning from the tomb under the identical guise of the consumptive Madame Marie, (a passage which Poe, possibly for unconscious reasons, suppressed as too evocative of his own mother—given the "incest" situation which follows) but now, in *Metzengerstein*, transforms Madame Marie into a monstrous, terrifying horse, it is because the actual theme of the tale is one of incest: a tale of "mounting" the mother and of the "dangers" attendant on that "chase". This feat, Edgar had doubtless seen performed by his father, or some lover, before he was three, since adults wrongly underrate what small children see. Thus, on the tapestry, the father (Berlifitzing), bestrides the mother (the horse), and the son (Metzengerstein) unhorses him and puts him to death in order *to seize the mother for himself*, as the story soon shows. This is the classical Œdipus situation, as it must have worked itself out, very early, in the precocious soul of the little Edgar.

As the terrified Frederick is about to leave the tapestried chamber, the glare of the conflagration projects his shadow on the tapestry, where it assumes the exact position, and precisely fills up the contour of his ancestor, the "murderer of the Saracen Berlifitzing".

The Baron hurries into the open air. At the palace gates he meets three grooms, who

“With much difficulty, and at the imminent peril of their lives, . . . were restraining the convulsive plunges of a gigantic and fiery-colored horse.

“Whose horse? Where did you get him?” demanded the youth in a querulous and husky tone, as he became instantly aware that the mysterious steed in the tapestried chamber was the very counterpart of the furious animal before his eyes.

“‘He is your own property, sire,’ replied one of the equerries, ‘at least, he is claimed by no other owner. We caught him flying, all smoking and foaming with rage, from the burning stables of the Castle Berliftzing.’”

The Berliftzing retainers, however, deny all knowledge of the horse, which they say has never before been seen in their master’s stables, although it bears the Berliftzing initials conspicuously branded on its brow. Baron Frederick then takes the horse for his own.

At this moment, a page announces that a small portion of the tapestry has disappeared and, a little later, another vassal informs him that his enemy, old Berliftzing, has miserably perished in the flames “in his rash exertions to rescue a favorite portion of his hunting stud”.

“From this date a marked alteration took place in the outward demeanor of the dissolute young Baron. . . He was never to be seen beyond the limits of his own domain, and, in this wide and social world, was utterly companionless—unless, indeed, that unnatural, impetuous, and fiery-colored horse, which he henceforth continually bestrode, had any mysterious right to the title of his friend.”

So doubtless, Edgar also unconsciously pictured the violence and possessiveness of his Œdipal passion for his mother, could that passion have been gratified.

“Indeed, the Baron’s perverse attachment to his lately-acquired charger—an attachment which seemed to attain new strength from every fresh example of the animal’s ferocious and demon-like propensities—at length became, in the eyes of all reasonable men, a hideous and unnatural fervor.” (As indeed, seems incest!) “In the glare of noon—at the dead hour of night—in sickness or in health—in calm or in tempest—the young Metzengerstein seemed riveted to the saddle of that colossal horse, whose intractable audacities so well accorded with his own spirit.”

Such “audacities”, on a sexual plane, were doubtless what, in phantasy

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and in response to his passion for her, the little Edgar would have hoped for from his mother.

Among the Baron's retainers, none doubt "the ardor of that extraordinary affection which existed on the part of the young nobleman for the fiery qualities of his horse". A little mis-shapen page, however, does dare to assert "that his master never vaulted into the saddle without an unaccountable and almost imperceptible shudder"; that same shudder, doubtless, which forever held Poe back, symbolically speaking, from "mounting into the saddle".

"One tempestuous night, Metzengerstein, awaking from heavy slumber, descended like a maniac from his chamber and, mounting in hot haste, bounded away into the mazes of the forest." Some hours later, "the stupendous and magnificent battlements of the Palace Metzengerstein, were discovered crackling and rocking to their very foundations, under the influence of a vast and livid mass of ungovernable fire". But all attempts to save the building are vain. "The astonished neighbourhood stood idly around in silent, if not apathetic, wonder." Then,

"Up the long avenue of aged oaks which led from the forest to the main entrance of the Palace Metzengerstein, a steed, bearing an unbonneted and disordered rider, was seen leaping with an impetuosity which outstripped the very Demon of the Tempest.

"The career of the horseman was indisputably, on his own part, uncontrollable. The agony of his countenance, the convulsive struggle of his frame, gave evidence of superhuman exertion." . . . Then . . . "clearing at a single plunge the gateway and the moat, the steed bounded far up the tottering staircase of the palace, and, with its rider, disappeared amid the whirlwind of chaotic fire.

"The fury of the tempest immediately died away, and a dead calm sullenly succeeded. A white flame still enveloped the building like a shroud, and, streaming far away into the quiet atmosphere, shot forth a glare of preternatural light; while a cloud of smoke settled heavily over the battlements in the distinct, colossal figure of—*a horse*."

Thus does Frederick Metzengerstein expiate his double Œdipal crime—his father-murder and mother-incest—and, by the law of talion, perishes in his blazing palace with his horse, as did the aged Berlitzing with his horses, in the stables fired by Frederick. In that same moment, however, the phantasied union in death with the mother comes to pass. Metzengerstein disappears in the flames with his horse, as Usher does with Madeline in the ruins of his manor; as the widower in *The Oblong Box* does in the sea, with the chest which contains his wife's embalmed

body; as the hero of *The Assignment* does in the rays of the rising sun with the Marchesa Aphrodite.

Floating above the smoking ruins of the palace which, like the tottering House of Usher, entombs the son at last made one with the mother, the outline of the horse appears like some immensely magnified and fantastic mortuary monument; the symbol of the destroying mother. So, too, upon the wall of a burning house, in another tale, we see the Black Cat gigantically silhouetted.

One might ask what meaning Poe himself attached to this tale and the significance, in his eyes, of the horse? The quotation at the head of the story proclaims: *Pestis eram vivus—moriens tua mors ero.*—Martin Luther. (Alive I was the plague—dying, I shall be thy death.) Thus, the horse, to Poe's unconscious, might have stood for the hated enemy, (the father), who drags to death his slayer, (the son). Yet, though the father's ghost always conveys the talion of death—the Œdipal vengeance—in *Metzengerstein*, though hidden from Poe, it was the mother herself who brought this to pass, by the frantic desires she inspires and the terrible joys she dispenses. Also, the horse has no name, (like the second Morella and Ligeia, whose family name is not mentioned), although on its brow it bears the initials of its suppositious owner, the "father" Berliftzing; it is his property and so, the mother.

Of some importance, too, in the genesis of this tale, are the accounts he must have heard, as a child, of the great fire at the theatre in Richmond, where his mother acted.¹ Yet more important still, was that he rode a great deal during his life with the Allans. Children love horses and their substitutes, rocking horses, for the pleasurable motion they impart; a pleasure which children crave. But this also gives a more secret delight, and one that is forbidden; namely, the sexual excitement which, when infantile masturbation has been suppressed by the threats and prohibitions of the child's upbringers, is converted into anxiety.

We owe an illuminating episode in Edgar's childhood to Edward Valentine, Frances Allan's cousin. It will be remembered that the Allans, returning from Virginia Hot Springs, stopped at his home in Staunton. Edgar was then about six.² During this stay, Valentine would often take Edgar for drives, or sit him on his horse's cruppers. One

¹ Cf. page 15. Harrison writes: "There was even a long-lasting tradition that the Poes had been burned alive in the theatre." (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 12, note 1.)

² Cf. pages 11-12.

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evening, returning thus from the post-office, they passed a solitary cabin surrounded by several graves. So great was the child's fear, that Valentine found it necessary to place him before him on the saddle. But the little, terrified boy, went on screaming, "They will run after us and drag me down!" Edgar then confessed that his negro nurse was wont to take him to the slaves' quarters, where he heard tales of ghosts and haunted graveyards. But these stories would not have taken such hold on the boy if, deep in his past, his mother's ghost had not smiled at him with her charnel-house teeth. Nor would the horseback ride with Valentine have had such power to terrify him, cemetery or no, had not his infantile libido, at six, already begun to enter the "latency period" under the pressure of the moral training of the Allans and, thus, been converted into anxiety; that anxiety from which Poe's tales draw their sustenance and which, riding his maddened horse, inspires the convulsions of the "incestuous" Metzengerstein.

Tales of the Mother as Landscape

THE MOTHER AS LANDSCAPE

The word *landscape*, as here used, is to be understood in its broadest sense as including whatever is visible to man, whether on earth, in the sea, or in the sky. I adopt this term because it best expresses the amplitude of the mother symbolism Poe employs and because the word *nature* is too fresh, too suggestive of open air and sunlight, to express the quality of his landscapes.

CHAPTER XXXI

Landscape Gardens and The Island of the Fay¹

IN *The Island of the Fay*, Poe, speaking of the joy he derives from the contemplation of one of those landscapes which he almost libellously calls "natural scenery", says:

"In truth, the man who would behold aright the glory of God upon earth must in solitude behold that glory. To me, at least, the presence not of human life only—but of life in any other form than that of the green things which grow upon the soil and are voiceless—is a stain upon the landscape—is at war with the genius of the scene."

Thus Poe deliberately excludes certain aspects of nature from his picture. For him, the song of birds, the drone of insects, above all the sound of human footsteps, are disturbing influences. Generally speaking, Poe's landscapes are as silent as death, save when disturbed by the roar of the tempest.² That Poe himself felt these landscapes to be so many substitutes or symbols for some strange, mysterious being, barely known to himself, the following passages show:

"I love, indeed, to regard the dark valleys, and the grey rocks, and the waters that silently smile . . . and the proud watchful mountains that look down upon all—I love to regard these as themselves but the colossal members of one vast animate and sentient whole. . . And since we see clearly that the endowment of matter with vitality is a principle—indeed, as far as our judgments extend, the *leading* principle in

¹ *The Island of the Fay*: *Graham's Magazine*, June, 1841; *Broadway Journal*, II, 13.

² In *Eleonora*, the birds which flash their plumage before the eyes of the lovers in the Valley of the Many-Colored Grass do not sing and only the inanimate stream finds voice. The only music in *The Domain of Arnheim* (first entitled *The Landscape Garden*) is the supernatural melody which accompanies the visitor as he glides along the stream and enters the regrettable gold gates that give access to the Domain. In *Landor's Cottage* only the cage-birds sing.

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the operations of Deity—it is scarcely logical to imagine it confined to the regions of the minute, where we daily trace it, and not extending to those of the august. . . In short, we are madly erring, through self-esteem, in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies, to be of more moment in the universe than that vast ‘clod of the valley’ which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold it in operation.”

To this Poe adds a footnote: “Speaking of the tides, Pomponius Mela, in his treatise ‘*De Situ Orbis*’, says ‘either the world is a great animal, or’ etc.” Thus, Poe confesses to the very anthropomorphism he denies and avows, that for him, man *is* more important than the *clod of the valley* and that his dreams are dreamed in the image of man.

To the child, in the earliest period of its existence, first and foremost is the human being around which everything revolves. The child at the breast knows nothing of the world: all it knows of it is the breast which gives it milk. This breast is more than something it may claim, it seems part and parcel of its own body. Thus, the mother’s proximity, by degrees, develops in the child its first conceptions of the outside world, for it soon learns to know her presence or absence, her yielding or withholding of the breast. Thus, to it, she is the first embodiment of that nature by which it is surrounded, whose every constituent, by degrees, attaches itself to the primal figure of the mother. Later, in adult life, nature which both feeds and harshly uses man will, by a sort of regression, come to symbolize the mother upon whom, originally, that nature was modelled but, now, as an immensely magnified, eternal, infinite mother. Thus, the manner in which each of us loves nature, always reflects, more or less, our own mother-complex. This law could not be better illustrated than in Poe’s own predilections in depicting nature.

We have already said, in connection with *Eleonora*, that the landscapes Poe so lovingly paints, though apparently paradisal, appear in effect to stifle the reader. They lack air and, in spite of their brilliant colouring, resemble a rouged and painted corpse; their oppressive scents and vanilla lawns seem like a flower-filled death-chamber in which lies a corpse. The same close, mephitic air, and sinister perfume, also hang over his woods, his lakes and lawns.

It must not be forgotten, when we read descriptions of landscapes as artificial as those of the *Valley of the Many-Colored Grass*, *The Domain of Arnheim*,¹ or even *Landor’s Cottage*,² where we meet the unusually

¹ *The Domain of Arnheim*: *Columbian Magazine*, March, 1847.

² *Landor’s Cottage*: Posthumously published by Griswold.

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youthful and robust Annie, that Poe's mother was an actress and that her son must often have seen her heavily made up. All the more heavily, doubtless, as her illness advanced, to hide its ravages from her audiences. Hence, possibly, in part, Poe's predilection for the artificial imposed upon nature, a predilection which he makes Ellison, on æsthetic grounds, seek to "rationalize" in *The Domain of Arnheim*.¹ Ellison opines that the geological disturbances which destroyed the primeval harmony of the earthly scene were "prognostic of death". Man has a right, therefore, to correct these disharmonies, and to restore its original and immortal beauty to the earth. Thus, she who is dying, the corpse, has every right to be made-up by man and his sons, "the earth-angels".

For Poe, every garden he describes—gardens whose velvet turf is reminiscent of the English lawns he knew as a child—hides a corpse under its turf. It is always the same corpse, as numerous avowals in his works show and as we see in *The Island of the Fay*. It is proclaimed, for instance, in the motto at the head of *The Domain of Arnheim*:

"The garden like a lady fair was cut,
That lay as if she slumbered in delight,
And to the open skies her eyes did shut . . ."

a garden, thus, like one of Poe's "sleeping" or dead heroines.

We see this symbolism still more clearly in *The Island of the Fay*, which, in its way, is also a piece of landscape gardening. The West of this isle is described as "all one radiant harem of garden beauties", but the East is "whelmed in the blackest shade". Its trees are

"dark in color and mournful in form and attitude—wreathing themselves into sad, solemn, and spectral shapes, that conveyed ideas of mortal sorrow and untimely death. The grass wore the deep tint of the cypress, and the heads of its blades hung droopingly, and, hither and thither among it, were many small unsightly hillocks, low, and narrow, and not very long, that had the aspects of graves, but were not; although over and all about them the rue and rosemary clambered. The shade of the trees fell heavily upon the water, and seemed to bury itself therein, impregnating the depths of the element with darkness."

Pursuing a strange idea, found later in the *Oval Portrait*, where the artist draws his colours from the model's cheek, Poe continues:

¹ Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde also sang the praises of the artificial.

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"I fancied that each shadow, as the sun descended lower and lower, separated itself sullenly from the trunk that gave it birth, and thus became absorbed by the stream; while other shadows issued momentarily from the trees, taking the place of their predecessors thus entombed".

With these trees and shadows, the island takes on the very attributes of the Fay, the dying woman, of whom it is but the symbol. And soon, in fact, the thus symbolised being appears. Even as the dreamer asks whether the enchanted isle be not "the haunt of the few gentle Fays who remain from the wreck of the race" and whether the "green tombs" are not theirs, and if they do not render up existence unto God "little by little . . . as these trees render up shadow after shadow, exhausting their substance unto dissolution"—the Fay herself appears from the direction of the setting sun, standing "erect, in a singularly fragile canoe, and" urging "it with the mere phantom of an oar". Whereupon it becomes apparent that "What the wasting tree is to the water that imbibes its shade, growing thus blacker by what it preys upon" . . . the life of the Fay is "to the death which engulfs it".

"While within the influence of the lingering sunbeams, her attitude seemed indicative of joy—but sorrow deformed it as she passed within the shade. Slowly she glided along, and at length rounded the islet and re-entered the region of light. 'The revolution which has just been made by the Fay,' continued I musingly, 'is the cycle of the brief year of her life. She has floated through her winter and through her summer. She is a year nearer unto Death: for I did not fail to see that as she came into the shade, her shadow fell from her, and was swallowed up in the dark water, making its blackness more black.' " Again and again the Fay makes the circuit of the island, "and at each issuing into the light, there was more sorrow about her person, while it grew feebler, and far fainter, and more indistinct; and at each passage into the gloom, there fell from her a darker shade, which became whelmed in a shadow more black. But at length, when the sun had utterly departed, the Fay, now the mere ghost of her former self, went disconsolately with her boat into the region of the ebony flood,—and that she issued thence at all I cannot say,—for darkness fell over all things, and I beheld her magical figure no more."

In these symbolic terms Poe yet again recounts the same sad story: that of the advancing illness of his beloved mother. She it was who at every passage, "through her winter and through her summer", grew steadily weaker: she it was who vanished in that final December when "darkness fell over all things", a darkness, for the small boy, of lifelong

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grief and infantile amnesia. We may be sure, however, that she was destined to re-emerge from it, though this could not consciously be known to Poe. For, with the deep, the indelible memory of the unconscious, from which what was repressed returns in symbols and substitutions, he was to remember. And it was, verily, with the shadowed hues that fell from his dying mother that he was thenceforth to paint his landscapes. To him, all nature would wear the mortal hues of her cheeks, and they would colour his vision of earth and sea and sky.

CHAPTER XXXII

Tales of the Sea

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket¹

OF all the mother symbols common to mankind, the sea is one of the most constant and fundamental, only equalled in importance as a symbol by the earth which nourishes us and, at last, receives us again. It is as though humanity, long before it was taught so by geology, instinctively knew that life first issued from the ocean. Genesis reveals how God said "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life," before He created the creatures of earth and sky, and most theogonies teach the same. It would seem, without resorting to the theory of some dim ancestral memory, that common observation of the birth-process, in which the mammal foetus issues from the amniotic waters, and the fact that water is indispensable to existence, would always make water and sea a common mother-symbol, which science would demonstrate as founded on fact.

Poe has left us three great tales of the sea: *MS. Found in a Bottle*,² *A Descent into the Maelström*³ and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

¹ *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*: appeared in part in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, January, February, 1837, and in book form in 1838.

² *MS. Found in a Bottle*: *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, October 12, 1833; *Southern Literary Messenger*, December 1835; *The Gift*, 1836; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 14.

³ *A Descent into the Maelström*: *Graham's Magazine*, May, 1841; 1845. According to the *Virginia Edition*, this tale originally formed part of the *Tales of the Folio Club*. Woodberry (II, pp. 401-402), apparently with good reason, has contested this attribution, which rests only on testimony given later by Latrobe.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym is Poe's longest imaginative work. The idea of writing a sustained narrative, in place of the short tales which had hitherto occupied his attention, was suggested to Poe by Paulding in 1836. In a letter, informing Poe that his first volume of stories, *The Tales of the Folio Club*, has just been refused by Harpers and that he has not been able to submit it to another publisher, Paulding adds, "I think it would be worth your while, if other engagements permit, to undertake a Tale in a couple of volumes, for that is the magical number".¹ Early in the following year, the first instalments of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* began to appear in the *Messenger*.

Thus, this tale owed its origin first to Poe's desire for the success which had so far eluded him, and then to need of money for his family. That year, 1836, he had just moved to Richmond, with Virginia and Mrs. Clemm, and his finances were anything but flourishing. Hence his digressions to lengthen the story, which were often taken verbatim from other sources as, for instance, those dealing with the stowing of ship's cargoes, the history of polar exploration, the habits of penguins, fishing for *bêche de mer*. But leaving aside these digressions, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* has considerable merit and is vastly superior to *The Journal of Julius Rodman*, for instance, which Poe, with good reason, left unsigned. In *Julius Rodman*, the colourless hero's crossing of the Rockies seems to have exerted little appeal upon Poe, since mountains, so far as we know, had no part in his life as a child. On the other hand, the sea, with its surging tides, its calms and tempests, its distant isles, was to inspire this child of the Atlantic sea-board with the most striking episodes of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

Artistically, it must be admitted, this story is inferior both in form and construction to *Ligeia* and *The Black Cat*. It was a unique gift which enabled Poe to pen the terrifying dreams that visit others only at night and, afterwards, fade on waking—dreams of vast compass in a nutshell. This gift it was that determined Poe's æsthetic standards: his insistence that the impression created be unique, powerful and instantaneous: desiderata which, as with all artists, were but rationalizations of his own temperament. Yet the wide sweep of this narrative hardly suited his temperament, despite his early and very real memories of a childhood and youth passed by the sea. Nevertheless, so deeply symbolic was that sea to him that, in many a page, he was enabled to tell of himself more magnificently and more revealingly than ever he knew

¹ Paulding to Poe, 17th March 1836. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 32).

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Because of its great significance and the unconscious depths it reveals, we shall analyse this tale here.

* * *

Before we proceed, however, let us seek to reply to an objection which many a reader may raise. Already, doubtless, our mother-figure landscapes and our mother-horse in *Metzengerstein* will have raised many a sceptical eyebrow. And now the reader is to see a whole procession of mother symbols, such as the sea, ships, an island and the South Pole, not to mention diverse animals. Little wonder, then, should the reader hurl the book from him and dub the author mad or obsessed. This seems, therefore, the place to reply to those who, in their ignorance of depth psychology, cry: "But the sea is the sea! Why not be satisfied with the obvious explanation that Poe, as a child, might have loved the sea, ships, and the sea breezes for what they actually are." Such critics thus mean that, to be loved, the real sea need not be invested with symbolic meaning.

And indeed, so intricately interwoven are our concepts of sea as symbol and sea as such, that it is indeed difficult to separate them. We know, for instance, that children love movement, whether running, jumping or being rocked in boats. We know, also, that an erotic element enters into this enjoyment, and it is not necessary to be a psycho-analyst to recommend sport for the young as a way of keeping them from sexual experiences, for it is common knowledge that the same heightened stimulus that produces sexual desire, may equally be discharged in muscular activity. It is not, however, the vague utilisation of sexual energy that is in question here, but the relation of sailing, for instance, to the sex-symbolism attached to some specified object, in this case the mother, and it is that which will be most hotly disputed.

As an analyst wittily said: "The aeroplane is a sex-symbol; it can also be used to fly from Munich to Vienna". So is it with all symbols. When we say that the sea, in the unconscious, is a mother symbol, we know that nevertheless, in consciousness, it retains its objective reality, such as its characteristic appearance, its storms and calms, its waves and fogs—which threaten us or lull us into security—and its surface on which we travel. But what we contend is that the sea, merely as sea, would never have laid so deep a spell on humanity. For what the sea sings has a double burden and the topmost notes, which we hear, are not what call to us deeply. What, from time immemorial, has ever drawn man to the sea, is its deep underlying burden, the song the sirens sang. So it is with dreams. It is generally held, for instance, that a bird seen during the day, explains the dream of a bird that night. It is forgotten, however,

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how many other objects were seen that day which did not appear in the night's dreams. The bird alone sufficed to awake a latent potentiality in the unconscious. To form a dream, a thing and a happening must come together: *i.e.*, an object or external event which releases feeling, must encounter some buried, unconscious wish of the dreamer, which then invests the external stimulus with the emotive charge that is needed to produce the dream. Similarly the sea, as sea, would never be loved so intensely, were it not for the unconsciously determined and heightened emotional charge with which our feeling for it is invested.

If we observe animals, a dog say, with its master on the beach, we see that while the man muses with delight on the murmuring, glittering waves and gazes spellbound at the horizon and moving sails, his dog's sole interest is in its fellows or the tracks they leave in the sand unless, indeed, some crab excites its hunting instincts or its master's voice calls it back, or better, it finds some jetsam to devour. Yet all this matters less to it than the hindquarters of other dogs, their urine or their excrement, in which its main interest in the universe seems to lie. Not even its master's voice can, at times, drag it away. Thus, so far as we can judge, it is indifferent to any beauty in nature. One cannot imagine a dog, or any animal, brought to a stop by a sublime landscape.

That, it will be said, is because the dog's brain is no more able to be moved æsthetically than to develop articulate speech. Agreed, but the mechanism which governs its impressions—not that I propose to explain it—is not explained by observing that the man's can and the dog's cannot. Doubtless, our so-called disinterested love of art and nature has to issue from the dark or buried depths of the human unconscious, peopled by the dim and majestic gods of our infancy which still survive there. This dominant emotive factor, which determines whether we love or hate without due justification, is what helps to decide our unconscious attitude to reality. It is not because hills are green and sea blue that we love them, even though these are the reasons we give; it is because something of ourselves and the associations buried within us are resuscitated by blue sea or green hills. This something of ourselves, these buried associations, inevitably and always derive from that which we loved in infancy, primarily attached to a simple sheltering creature dispensing nourishment, represented by mother or nurse, even though, in place of the breast, a bottle was presented. It was only later that the father appeared, stronger than the mother and more to be feared, a rival for her affections, as are younger sisters and brothers. Lastly, crystallising round these living creatures, animals, plants and all natural objects

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appear to the child's wondering gaze and seem at the time *to be of the same species* as the first beings it knew; the human beings from whom it derives. The very young child's vision of the world is entirely anthropomorphic; it hits the table against which it has bumped to punish it for meaning to hurt it. Savages still see the universe in this fashion and Xerxes had the sea beaten for hindering the passage of his fleet.

However civilised and cultured we may be as individuals, it is this anthropomorphic and animistic vision of the universe that persists in our unconscious. From it issues our affective attitude to objects, even when intellectually, rationally, we appear detached. Every object in nature, from the star to the grain of sand, is *loved* or *hated* only because of this deep-buried unconscious attitude which vitalises all objects. Yet, at the same time, in the same mind, we may find dispassionate, detached, rational or scientific responses to these very same objects, as in the engineer building a bridge, though the same engineer may originally have been led to choose his profession by the deep emotional drives with which, for him, it was invested. However impersonal he may be at work, he may well find himself dreaming at night of some gesture similar to Xerxes', should floods seem to threaten his schemes.

In this we come closer than we think to the dog we earlier referred to: we too can only feel *emotional* interest in what affects our own species and its basic needs. The dog, outside its kind, loves also its master who shelters and gives it food, but that is the one exception.

The fact that, on the sea-shore, the man may be rapt in contemplation of the horizon while his dog scents out others is because, to the man, unlike the dog, the sea is more than a mass, heaving, restless; to him, it is, in fact, full of human interest. The immense range of our perceptions has enabled us to instil something of man into all objects, not only in fact, but symbolically, too. Thus, to return on our tracks, the man who gazes out to sea is not so different from the dog with its nose to the ground, since each ends up having sought, and found, itself.

Infinite are the symbols man has the capacity to create, as indeed, the dreams and religions of the savage and civilized well show. Every natural object may be utilised to this end yet, despite their multiple shapes, the objects and relations to which they attach are relatively few: these include the beings we loved first, such as mother, father, brothers or sisters and their bodies, but mainly our own bodies and genitals, and theirs. Almost all symbolism is sexual, in its widest sense, taking the word as the deeply-buried and primal urge behind all expressions of love, from the cradle to the grave.

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And that even, when, as with Poe, the child's moral education has finally repressed all sexual manifestations and with it the infantile incest-phantasy: they are then so deeply buried in the unconscious that to the layman they seem non-existent, as it seemed even to Baudelaire when he wrote: "Love plays no part in Poe's writings".¹

Poe was well acquainted with the sea and had doubtless often voyaged with his actress mother on her tours from Boston to Richmond and Norfolk, via New York—in which city his father disappeared—and even to Charleston, South Carolina. Later, with the Allans in Richmond, his background was the port and the ships that traded for his guardian in merchandise of all kinds. He would have heard the tales told by sailors and sea-captains at his guardian's table. His own journey to England, in the summer of 1815, and his crossing the Atlantic, must have been a tremendous event to the six-year-old boy.

Edgar was eleven on his return to Richmond in 1820. There, he renewed his comradeship with the somewhat older Ebenezer Burling, an old friend who had attended the Richmond Memorial Church and taught him to swim before he was six. The two now became inseparable, all but brothers, in fact, who often sailed their boat on the James River and may even have ventured into the estuary. Eventually, in March 1827, both were to bolt from home together. Ebenezer, when his intoxication was past, returned to his mother, but Edgar broke finally with John Allan.

It is on real memories such as these that the first chapter of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is based. This first chapter has the air of a prelude to the fantastic, raging symphony to be played by the sea. It is mainly autobiographical, as if Poe had wanted to demonstrate how deeply derived, from a real and early knowledge of the sea, was the mother-symbolism which dominates the rest of the tale with such amplitude and so authoritative an accent.

"My name is Arthur Gordon Pym," begins the hero. "My father was a respectable trader in sea-stores at Nantucket, where I was born."

At the time of which we write, Nantucket was the most important whaling port on the coast and, as such, Pym's obvious birthplace. But, also, Nantucket is north of Richmond and it was in Boston, still further north, that Poe himself was born. Thus, the point from which Pym was

¹Dans l'œuvre d'Edgar Poë, il n'y a jamais d'amour. Preface to *Histoires extraordinaires*.

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to start on his conquest of the sea, was doubly determined by geographic and psychic factors.

"My maternal grandfather was an attorney in good practice. He was fortunate in everything, and had speculated very successfully in stocks of the Edgarton New-Bank, as it was formerly called. By these and other means he had managed to lay by a tolerable sum of money. He was more attached to myself, I believe, than to any other person in the world, and I expected to inherit the most of his property at his death."

Poe-Pym thus introduces John Allan in the guise of the heir's maternal grandfather and as having made a fortune by speculating in Edgar's stock, the Edgarton New-Bank. In this fiction, as in reality, Edgar's own father is ignored and the emphasis is laid on the heir's expectations to his "father's" fortune, namely John Allan's; expectations, however, which in fiction and fact, were to be disappointed.

Further details, also doubtless biographical, follow: "He sent me, at six years of age, to the school of old Mr. Ricketts, a gentleman with only one arm, and of eccentric manners—he is well known to almost every person who has visited New Bedford. . ."—or Richmond, in other words, where a one-armed Mr. Ricketts actually kept a school which, it appears, the little Edgar attended.¹ . . . "I stayed at his school until I was sixteen, when I left him for Mr. E. Ronald's academy on the hill." This account of Poe's school life is considerably condensed, for he could not have remained so long with the old Mr. Ricketts if he also attended a school "on the hill", as part of Richmond was then known.

"Here I became intimate with the son of Mr. Barnard, a sea-captain . . . in the employ of Lloyd and Vredenburg." (Ebenezer Burling's father, defunct at the time, had been a printer. For the purposes of the tale, however, it was necessary to make him a sea-captain.) "His son was named Augustus, and he was nearly two years older than myself. . ." as was Henry Poe, Edgar's brother. (We do not know whether there was a similar difference in age between Edgar and Ebenezer, clearly a substitute for Poe's elder brother.) "He had been on a whaling voyage with his father in the John Donaldson, and was always talking to me of his adventures in the South Pacific Ocean." (So, too, in their Baltimore days, under Mrs. Clemm's roof, Henry regaled Edgar with stories of

¹ After J. H. WHITTY, *Memoir to the Complete Poems*, quoted in *Israfel*, p. 57. I am indebted to Hervey Allen for all these biographical parallels.

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voyages and adventures which Edgar, in default of similar exploits, was to use for the tall tales he later invented for his listeners. As to Ebenezer Burling, they had once read *Robinson Crusoe* together, an exciting experience for both.) “. . . I used frequently to go home with him, and remain all day, and sometimes all night.” (We know that Mr. Allan disapproved strongly of Edgar’s staying the night at Burling’s home.) “We occupied the same bed, and he would be sure to keep me awake until almost light, telling me stories of the natives of the Island of Tinian, and other places he had visited in his travels.” (Here we see an echo of Henry’s tales, as of the books read with Ebenezer.) “At last I could not help being interested in what he said, and by degrees I felt the greatest desire to go to sea. I owned a sail-boat called the Ariel and worth about seventy-five dollars. She had a half-deck or cuddy, and was rigged sloop-fashion—I forget her tonnage, but she would hold ten persons without much crowding. In this boat we were in the habit of going on some of the maddest freaks in the world. . .” In this we see the description of Burling’s skiff, in which Poe often sailed on the James River with this new *brother*.

“I will relate one of these adventures by way of introduction to a longer and more momentous narrative. One night there was a party at Mr. Barnard’s, and both Augustus and myself were not a little intoxicated towards the close of it.” Here we hear the first notes of the theme which was to occupy as much place in this tale as it did in Poe’s life, as well as in that of his “brothers”, Henry and Ebenezer. It is said that Burling contracted this habit very young, and it was in Richardson’s Tavern, which Burling frequented, that Poe sought refuge when, in 1827, he fled from John Allan’s house. There Ebenezer joined him and accompanied him part of his way. Augustus and his friend, then, are intoxicated. “As usual, in such cases, I took part of his bed in preference to going home. He went to sleep, as I thought, very quietly . . . and without saying a word on his favorite topic.” Half an hour later, however, Augustus wakes and announces his determination “to go out on a frolic with the boat”. Pym thinks “that the wines and liquors he had drunk had set him entirely beside himself”, but Augustus seems perfectly self-possessed and persuades his friend to go, too.

Outside, it is blowing almost a gale. They hoist sail and Augustus takes the helm while his friend stations himself by the mast, on the deck of the cuddy. The boat flies along at great speed, making straight for the sea. After several attempts to question Augustus, Pym finally realises that his friend is “drunk—beastly drunk—he could no longer either

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stand, speak, or see", after which he rolls "like a mere log into the bilge-water".

"It was evident that . . . his conduct in bed had been the result of a highly-concentrated state of intoxication—a state which, like madness, frequently enables the victim to imitate the outward demeanor of one in perfect possession of his senses. . . He was now thoroughly insensible, and there was no probability that he would be otherwise for many hours."

Pym is incapable of managing the boat alone—

"... a fierce wind and strong ebb tide were hurrying us to destruction. A storm was evidently gathering behind us . . . and it was clear that, if we held our present course, we should be out of sight of land before daybreak. . . The boat was going . . . full before the wind . . . no reef in either jib or mainsail. . . By good luck, however, she kept steady."

Pym then lets go the mainsail, which carries the mast away and saves them from instant destruction. He also manages to raise Augustus from the bottom of the boat where he lies senseless and, in order to secure him in a sitting position, passes a cord round his waist which he lashes to a ringbolt.

Now, however, with the mainmast and sail, goes autobiography, for

"a loud and long scream or yell, as if from the throats of a thousand demons, seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere around and above the boat".

Pym falls insensible, and wakes to find himself "in the cabin of a large whaling-ship (the Penguin) bound to Nantucket" which had run them down in the night. He learns that the *wicked* captain had meant to hold to his course and make no attempt to search for possible victims; the *good* first mate, however, had forced him to turn back. Pym had been found "affixed in the most singular manner to the smooth and shining bottom" of the copper-sheathed keel of the Penguin, having been caught, as his body passed under the ship, by the head of a timber-bolt which had "made its way through the collar of the green baize jacket I had on, and through the back part of my neck, forcing itself out between two sinews and just below the right ear". Augustus, too, is rescued, struggling near the deck of the Ariel's cuddy, "attached by a rope to the floating timber". The youths are then given every attention, their wounds are bandaged and they reach home in time for breakfast. With the blindness natural to relatives, neither Mr. Barnard nor other members of the family observe anything amiss.

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Such is the prelude to Arthur Gordon Pym's more distant voyages. He has stated his theme and will develop it with ever more impressive variations.

"It might be supposed," continues Pym, "that a catastrophe such as I have just related would have effectually cooled my incipient passion for the sea." Far otherwise in fact, for we now see that Pym is, as it were, *born* to the sea—born of the Penguin's copper flanks from which, so suggestively, he hung. And this, to the unconscious, is no hollow metaphor, as we shall see. Meanwhile, Augustus has resumed his tales of the sea, which ever more inflame his friend's "gloomy, although glowing imagination".

"It is strange . . . that he most strongly enlisted my feelings in behalf of the life of a seaman, when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair. For the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires—for they amounted to desires—are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men. . ."

And such, indeed, were the desires of the repressed sado-masochist and necrophilist in Poe: desires which, in place of acts, were to dictate his loves and his literary opus.

"About eighteen months after the period of the Ariel's disaster, the firm of Lloyd and Vredenburg . . . were engaged in repairing and fitting out the brig *Grampus* for a whaling voyage. She was an old hulk, and scarcely seaworthy when all was done to her that could be done. I hardly know why she was chosen in preference to other and good vessels belonging to the same owners—but so it was. Mr. Barnard was appointed to command her, and Augustus was going with him."

Here Augustus urges Pym to go too and represents the voyage as an excellent opportunity to indulge his desire to travel. But "the matter could not be so easily arranged. My father made no direct opposition, but my mother went into hysterics at the bare mention of the design", as Frances Allan doubtless had done when her foster-son ran off to sea; the real sea in that instance. His true father, David Poe, had also made no "direct opposition" to his thus "seizing" the mother, prototype of the *symbolic sea* for, in disappearing, he abandoned her to the little son.

But Mr. Allan, with a husband's and master's jealousy must have

treated his pupil's love for Frances the mother very differently as, doubtless, Edgar's wish to be free and independent when, in 1827, he ran off to sea. "More than all," he now continues, "my grandfather, from whom I expected much, vowed to cut me off with a shilling if I should ever broach the subject to him again". The two brother conspirators, nevertheless, make secret plans to depart.

"I had a relation living in New Bedford, a Mr. Ross, at whose house I was in the habit of spending occasionally two or three weeks at a time. The brig was to sail about the middle of June (June, 1827)"—(in the March of which year Poe, in fact, fled from his Richmond home)—"and it was agreed that, a day or two before putting to sea, my father was to receive a note, as usual, from Mr. Ross, asking me to come over and spend a fortnight with Robert and Emmet (his sons). Augustus charged himself with the inditing of this note and getting it delivered. Having set out, as supposed, for New Bedford, I was then to report myself to my companion, who would contrive a hiding-place for me in the Grampus. This hiding-place, he assured me, would be rendered sufficiently comfortable for a residence of many days, during which I was not to make my appearance. When the brig had proceeded so far on her course as to make any turning back a matter out of question, I should then, he said, be formally installed in all the comforts of the cabin; and as to his father, he would only laugh heartily at the joke."

Here again we have the *good* father who freely allows his son to go to sea or to board ship (*i.e.*, possess the mother), in contrast to the *wicked* father, who will soon reappear.

All being ready for departure, Augustus leads the way to the wharf,

"and I followed at a little distance, enveloped in a thick seaman's cloak, which he had brought with him, so that my person might not be easily recognised. Just as we turned the second corner . . . who should appear, standing right in front of me, and looking me full in the face, but old Mr. Peterson, my grandfather. 'Why, bless my soul, Gordon,' said he, after a long pause, 'why, why,—*whose* dirty cloak is that you have on?'"

It is almost as though we were hearing John Allan's testy voice! To this Edgar-Gordon gruffly answers with an air of offended surprise:

"'Sir! . . . you are a sum'mat mistaken; my name, in the first place, been't nothing at all like Goddin, and I'd want you for to know better, you blackguard, than to call my new obercoat a darty one.' For my life I could hardly refrain from screaming with laughter at the odd manner in which the old gentleman received this handsome rebuke."

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He started back two or three steps, turned first pale and then excessively red, threw up his spectacles, then, putting them down, ran full tilt at me, with his umbrella uplifted. He stopped short, however, in his career, as if struck with a sudden recollection; and presently, turning round, hobbled off down the street, shaking all the while with rage, and muttering between his teeth, 'Won't do—new glasses—thought it was Gordon—d—d good-for-nothing salt water Long Tom'."

Thus we have John Allan in person, superbly depicted in this caricatured grandfather. In Poe's eye, no attribute could reveal him better than having to abandon the chase because of his *avarice*. But now the father is eliminated, the coast seems clear for the son to pursue his way to the sea (or mother).

But in how strange a manner! For soon, with Pym, we find ourselves in the darkness and symbolic mazes of the most oppressive nightmares. The brother-conspirators board the almost deserted ship, so escaping observation, and waste no time on the cabins and but little on Augustus's stateroom, where was "a kind of safe or refrigerator", stocked with "a host of delicacies, both in the eating and drinking department", the latter doubtless needful for one of Augustus's proclivities. The latter is, however, anxious that his friend conceal himself with all speed, and leads him to a hiding place already prepared. A trap-door, masked by the stateroom carpet, reveals a passage into the after hold. Armed with a dark lantern, Augustus descends and bids Pym follow.

The trap-door is closed:

"The taper gave out so feeble a ray, that it was with the greatest difficulty I could grope my way through the confused mass of lumber among which I now found myself. By degrees, however, my eyes became accustomed to the gloom. . ."

Eventually, Augustus, "through innumerable narrow passages", winding in and out of a chaos of "crates, hampers, barrels, and bales" in the hold, leads his friend to

"an iron-bound box, such as is used sometimes for packing fine earthenware. It was nearly four feet high, and full six long, but very narrow . . . , My companion now showed me that one of the ends of the box could be removed at pleasure. He slipped it aside and displayed the interior, at which I was excessively amused. A mattress from one of the cabin berths covered the whole of its bottom, and it contained almost every article of mere comfort which could be crowded into so small a space, allowing me, at the same time, sufficient room for my accommodation,

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either in a sitting position or lying at full length. Among other things, there were some books, pen, ink, and paper, three blankets, a large jug full of water, a keg of sea-biscuit, three or four immense Bologna sausages, an enormous ham, a cold leg of roast mutton, and half a dozen bottles of cordials and liqueurs."

Pym then takes possession of his new abode, happier than any monarch "entering a new palace", while Augustus points out how to fasten the the open end of the box and shows him "a piece of dark whip-cord" lying along it.

"This he said, extended from my hiding-place throughout all the necessary windings among the lumber, to a nail which was driven into the deck of the hold, immediately beneath the trapdoor leading into his state-room."

He then leaves Pym a good supply of tapers and "phosphorus", promises to visit him as often as possible and departs. The date is the seventeenth of June.

During the next three days and nights, Pym only ventures from his hiding-place twice, in order to stretch his limbs. Meanwhile, the brig remains in port and Augustus gives no sign, too preoccupied to do so. At last, however, on the fourth day, his voice is heard overhead and he calls through the trap to ask whether there is anything Pym wanted. He also tells Pym that he can get his watch by creeping along by the whip-cord to the nail under the trap-door. An hour later the brig sails and Pym sets out to procure the watch, "following the cord through windings innumerable", amid the chests and hampers that fill the hold. Securing it at length, he settles himself snugly in his coffin-like box:

"I now looked over the books which had been so thoughtfully provided, and selected the expedition of Lewis and Clarke to the mouth of the Columbia. With this I amused myself for some time, when, growing sleepy, I extinguished the light with great care, and soon fell into a sound slumber."

It is when Pym wakes that his sinister and horrifying adventure begins. Augustus, contrary to Ebenezer Burling, had indeed set sail with his friend, but only to abandon him in the hold. Pym finds himself strangely confused and his limbs greatly cramped: his head aches, he has sensations of suffocation and is ravenously hungry. His watch has stopped, and he imagines he must have slept an inordinate time since the leg of mutton, among his provisions, is in a state of putrefaction.

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He now rewinds the watch, but a further twenty-four hours elapse before there is any sign of Augustus. Having eaten freely of his Bologna sausage and almost exhausted his water, Pym now suffers the tortures of thirst. He can, naturally, no longer be interested in his books and, though overcome with sleep, cannot allow himself to doze for fear of "some pernicious influence, like that of burning charcoal, in the confined air of the hold". He wonders whether Augustus can have died, or fallen overboard. Meanwhile, the rolling of the brig and the sound of straining timbers, tell him that the ship is speeding through an unusually violent gale.

Despite every effort to the contrary, Pym eventually succumbs to sleep, a sleep haunted by terrible dreams. He imagines himself smothered to death between huge pillows, or that immense serpents hold him embraced: "forlorn and awe-inspiring deserts" such as only Poe could conceive spread out before him, or he sees an endless succession of tall trunks of grey leafless trees, their roots "concealed in wide-spreading morasses, whose dreary water lay intensely black, still, and altogether terrible beneath. And the strange trees seemed endowed with a human vitality, and, waving to and fro their skeleton arms, were crying to the silent waters for mercy. . ." Again, he sees himself "naked and alone amid the burning sand plains" of the Sahara, with a fierce lion crouched at his feet. "Suddenly his wild eyes opened and fell upon me. With a convulsive bound he sprang to his feet, and laid bare his horrible teeth." A roar bursts from its throat and Pym wakes to find "the paws of some huge and real monster" pressing heavily on his chest: "his hot breath was in my ear—and his white and ghastly fangs were gleaming upon me through the gloom".

Thus, we are once again in the presence of the teeth-danger theme: one, as we shall see, always connected with the mother's teeth. Not by chance does Pym's dream represent him standing "naked and alone", like a child new-born or unborn, before this lion whose wild eyes, like Ligeia's, open. This monster of his dream and first awaking, proves to be his own Newfoundland dog Tiger, which, strange though it seems, also symbolises safety from the mother and the dangers she implies.

Pym, in tears, casts himself on the neck of the faithful animal, though unable to conceive how it has managed to find him in the hold. He also feels far more ill and, racked by fever and thirst, gropes about for his water. Alas! Tiger has lapped up the dregs and devoured the rotten mutton. It is then that, unable to find his tapers, with trembling limbs he gropes his way by the cord through the darkness to the succour of the trap-door.

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But now a violent roll of the vessel hurls a crate in his path and the new obstacle fills him with despair. Shall he attempt to surmount it or seek a way round? Fortunately, he is able to pry away a plank and thus can hold his way amid "the dismal and disgusting labyrinths of the hold". After innumerable trials, he at last reaches the trap-door, only to find it resist every attempt to push it open.

"My sensations were those of extreme horror and dismay. In vain I attempted to reason on the probable cause of my being thus entombed. I could summon up no connected chain of reflection, and, sinking on the floor, gave way, unresistingly, to the most gloomy imaginings, in which the dreadful deaths of thirst, famine, suffocation, and premature interment, crowded upon me as the prominent disasters to be encountered."

He then runs the blade of his pocket knife round the crevices between the trap-door and its frame, finds that it appears to be held down by a mass of chain-cable, and returns to his box in despair. There he discovers, attached to Tiger—who persists in lying "on his back, with his paws uplifted"—a slip of letter paper tied under the left shoulder, by a string which passes round its body. This, he realizes, must be a note from Augustus.

Pym now again searches for his "phosphorus" matches and tapers by which to read Augustus's note. His search is vain, but a faint glimmer of light "in the direction of the steerage" attracts his attention. It comes and goes as he moves and, eventually, he discovers that it comes from some fragments of his matches "lying in an empty barrel turned upon its side". Wondering how they came to be there, his hand falls on some pieces of taperwax which have "evidently been mumbled by the dog". His candles, too, have been devoured and, with only the speck or two of phosphorus which he manages to gather, he returns with difficulty to his box, where Tiger has all the while remained.

Follows an episode in which Pym describes his agonising efforts to read his note, efforts which recall certain frustration nightmares, in which the dreamer strives to run but is powerless to move, or wishes to speak but can utter no sound, dreams which, on analysis, are often revealed as impotence-dreams. It need not therefore surprise those acquainted with Poe's life that his tales so often give exactly this impression.

"In vain I revolved in my brain a multitude of absurd expedients for procuring light—such expedients precisely" as would occur to a man "in the perturbed sleep occasioned by opium"—a sleep, be it noted, in

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which the subject renders himself similarly impotent. Finally, Pym places the slip of paper on a book and rubs the fragments of phosphorus over it with his palm. "A clear light diffused itself immediately throughout the whole surface" but "Not a syllable was there . . . nothing but a dreary and unsatisfactory blank." After which Pym is so exhausted by his efforts that many hours pass before he can think he has scrutinised but one side of the paper! Alas! in his first disappointment, he has torn up and thrown the paper away.

Now, however, Tiger again comes to his rescue, by scenting out the scattered portions, from a piece his master has managed to find. But this again presents a problem, for which side has he already examined? It is of the utmost importance for him to make sure, before he uses the rest of the phosphorus, since he has not enough for a third attempt. Fortunately, in the dark, its trace may still be detected on one side of the paper. Thus he is able to piece the fragments together and, by the faint light of his remaining phosphorus, to read the words that end the note: "*blood—your life depends upon lying close*".

Pym, who, in his distress had decided, at whatever cost, to attract the crew's attention, now abandons hope.

"For another twenty-four hours it was barely possible that I might exist without water—for a longer time I could not do so. During the first portion of my imprisonment I had made free use of the cordials with which Augustus had supplied me, but they only served to excite fever, without in the least degree assuaging my thirst. I had now only about a gill left, and this was of a species of strong peach liqueur at which my stomach revolted."

Furthermore, he now finds the greatest difficulty in breathing the noxious air of the hold and, worse, Tiger has begun to behave in alarming fashion,

"panting and wheezing in a state of the greatest apparent excitement, his eyeballs flashing fiercely through the gloom. . .

"I had no doubt whatever that the want of water or the confined atmosphere of the hold had driven him mad, and I was at a loss what course to pursue."

Meanwhile the dog lies crouched in a threatening attitude close by the door of the box so that Pym, to issue, must pass over its body. This he finally determines to hazard, but the dog seems to anticipate his design, for "raising himself upon his fore-legs (as I perceived by the altered position of his eyes)" he displayed

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"the whole of his white fangs, which were easily discernible. I took the remains of the ham-skin, and the bottle containing the liqueur, and secured them about my person, together with a large carving-knife which Augustus had left me—then, folding my cloak as closely around me as possible, I made a movement towards the mouth of the box."

The dog thereupon springs at his master, who falls to the floor but, by great good luck, the cloak protects his throat from the animal's fangs. Pym, however, manages to throw his blankets over the dog and so reach the mouth of the box, which he shuts after him, thus enclosing the dog as in a coffin.

"In this struggle, however, I had been forced to drop the morsel of ham-skin, and now I found my whole stock of provisions reduced to a single gill of liqueur. As this reflection crossed my mind, I felt myself actuated by one of those fits of perverseness which might be supposed to influence a spoiled child in similar circumstances, and, raising the bottle to my lips, I drained it to the last drop, and dashed it furiously upon the floor."

Thus Poe-Pym, unlike Metzengerstein, rids himself of the dangerous fanged mother-animal—but, so doing, dooms himself to impotency, while the maddened Tiger remains shut in his coffin. This passage, indeed, sheds singular light on the psychological origins of Poe's dipsomania, for it is in a drunkard's rage that he drains the last drop, a rage which Poe justly describes as a "fit of perverseness". The "fit" of rage, however, followed on the loss of Tiger and the ham-skin and the bottle he drains is, as it were, to console himself for this loss. May we not have here a representation of the traumatic effects of weaning? It was because he had lost his mother and her breasts¹ that Poe, unable to renounce her entirely, began to seek her in drink, that substitute for the milk of the lost mother: this was what he sought in his drinking bouts, an "innocent", because infantile form, as it were, of possessing the mother on a primitive oral-erotic level.

As we saw, however, in the biographical part of this work drink, as so often, also represented for Poe the flight from women to men and

¹ Freud has drawn attention to the curious disgust often shown by children for the skin which forms on boiled milk, as though the pleasure which they once drew from the skin of the mother's breast (the *skin*, as we might say, of *her* milk) had, after weaning, been converted into anxiety. Here the ham-skin would be a substitute for the skin on the milk, at the child's "cannibalistic" level.

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boon companions. Thus, scarcely does the bottle crash to the floor than his "brother" Augustus appears.

"I heard my name pronounced in an eager but subdued voice, issuing from the direction of the steerage. So unexpected was anything of the kind, and so intense was the emotion excited within me by the sound, that I endeavoured in vain to reply. My powers of speech totally failed. . ."

exactly as in impotence-nightmares.

Augustus, hearing nothing, begins to move away, whereupon Pym, still unable to move or speak, falls and his carving-knife rattles to the floor. Augustus realises that his friend still lives.

Now Augustus returns, scrambling through the hold. He brings water, which Pym, with the thirst of the newly *weaned*, greedily drinks; he also brings cold potatoes, a light and—news, from which Pym learns that the men have mutinied, led by the first mate, and that Captain Barnard, Augustus's father, has been wounded and set adrift in one of the boats. Augustus, himself, only owes his life to the protection of a certain Dirk Peters, a half-breed "line-manager", whose good heart belies his ferocious aspect. In all, twenty-two men have been murdered by the black cook's axe and their bodies thrown overboard. Augustus was saved from the like fate by Peters claiming him for a clerk. He also saw that Augustus, a prisoner in the foc's'le, was duly fed. The latter, by cutting through the partition behind his berth, managed to enter the hold in search of his friend. When he failed to reach him he had sent Tiger down with the note.

Augustus now tells Pym that the mutineers, after their success, have split in two camps: one, led by the mate, favoured seizing the first ship met and fitting her out as a pirate—the other, the cook's, which included Dirk Peters, was bent on pursuing their original course to the South Pacific, there "either to take whale, or act otherwise, as circumstances should suggest".

Thereupon, Augustus leads his friend through the labyrinth of the hold to a point behind the foc's'le partition where he remains hidden, and through a hole in which Augustus can pass him some of the food provided by Peters.

Let us glance for a moment at Poe's description of this Peters, who is to play so important a part in the tale. Son of a fur trader and an Indian woman of the tribe of Upsarokas, Peters

"was one of the most ferocious-looking men I ever beheld. He was short in stature—not more than four feet eight inches high—but his

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limbs were of Herculean mould. His hands, especially, were so enormously thick and broad as hardly to retain a human shape. His arms, as well as legs, were *bowed* in the most singular manner, and appeared to possess no flexibility whatever. His head was equally deformed, being of immense size, with an indentation on the crown (like that on the head of most negroes), and entirely bald. To conceal this latter deficiency, which did not proceed from old age, he usually wore a wig formed of any hair-like material which presented itself—occasionally the skin of a Spanish dog or American grizzly bear. At the time spoken of he had on a portion of one of these bear-skins; and it added no little to the natural ferocity of his countenance, which betook of the Upsaroka character. The mouth extended nearly from ear to ear; the lips were thin, and seemed, like some other portions of his frame, to be devoid of natural pliancy, so that the ruling expression never varied under the influence of any emotion whatever. This ruling expression may be conceived when it is considered that the teeth were exceedingly long and protruding, and never even partially covered, in any instance, by the lips. To pass this man with a casual glance, one might imagine him to be convulsed with laughter—but a second look would induce a shuddering acknowledgement, that if such an expression were indicative of merriment, the merriment must be that of a demon.”

Such is the *good* Peters and to analyse each of his singular features, one by one, we should need the same associations as Poe. We shall therefore content ourselves with observing that Peter’s strength and distorted figure somewhat remind one of the monsters children draw, and that the typically Poesque mother-theme of teeth now re-stated in the half-breed, doubtless announces that Peters, like a mother who might be terrifying but is willing to be kind, having rescued and fed Augustus, will preside at the *rebirth* of the latter’s brother, Pym.

Augustus thus reveals to Peters that Pym is on board. Peter’s camp, meanwhile, has been greatly reduced, the cook, with his supporters, having gone over to the “pirating” camp. Its leader, the mate, has just despatched Hartman Rogers, upon whom Peters had mainly relied, by poisoning his grog. Peters and Augustus thus stand alone, and the former is glad to hear of Pym’s presence.

The three now plot to regain possession of the ship before the mate, as he clearly intends, can rid himself of Augustus and Peters. “In the event of success, we were to run the brig into the first port that offered, and deliver her up.” Peters would thus earn his pardon.

Meanwhile a gale blows up.

“We agreed that no opportunity could be more favorable than the

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present for carrying our design into effect. . . The main difficulty was the great disproportion in our forces. There were only three of us, and in the cabin there were nine. All the arms on board, too, were in their possession, with the exception of a pair of small pistols which Peters had concealed about his person, and the large seaman's knife which he always wore in the waistband of his pantaloons. From certain indications, too—such, for example, as there being no such thing as an axe or a hand-spike lying in their customary places—we began to fear that the mate had his suspicions, at least in regard to Peters, and that he would let slip no opportunity of getting rid of him.”

Furthermore, a watch had been set on deck, a most unusual precaution when a ship is hove-to in a gale.

The three then discuss plans of attack and eventually accept Pym's proposal, given the smallness of their numbers—and given the fact that Pym is Poe!

“By good fortune I at length hit upon the idea of working upon the superstitious terrors and guilty conscience of the mate. It will be remembered that one of the crew, Hartman Rogers, had died during the morning, having been attacked two days before with spasms after drinking some spirits and water. Peters had expressed to us his opinion that this man had been poisoned by the mate. . . Rogers had died about eleven in the forenoon, in violent convulsions; and the corpse presented in a few minutes after death one of the most horrid and loathsome spectacles I ever remember to have seen. The stomach was swollen immensely, like that of a man who has been drowned and lain under water for many weeks. The hands were in the same condition, while the face was shrunk, shrivelled, and of a chalky whiteness, except where relieved by two or three glaring red splotches, like those occasioned by the erysipelas; one of these splotches extending diagonally across the face, completely covering up an eye as if with a band of red velvet. In this disgusting condition the body had been brought up from the cabin at noon to be thrown overboard, when the mate getting a glimpse of it (for he now saw it for the first time), and being either touched with remorse for his crime or struck with terror at so horrible a sight, ordered the men to sew the body up in its hammock, and allow it the usual rites of sea-burial.”

The gale coming on, however,

“the design was abandoned for the present. The corpse, left to itself, was washed into the larboard scuppers, where it still lay at the time of which I speak, floundering about with the furious lurches of the brig. Having arranged our plan, we set about putting it in execution as speedily as possible.”

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Peters goes on deck, seizes Allen, the man on watch, throws him overboard and calls to his friends, who join him. They then seek for weapons but find nothing better than the two pump-handles, with which they arm themselves. Next they strip the shirt from Rogers' corpse and cast it into the sea. While Augustus remains on deck, impersonating Allen, Peters goes below with Pym, who now disguises himself as the corpse by donning the dead man's shirt and stuffing it with rags to simulate Rogers' bloated belly. He also dons white mittens which he stuffs in the same way. He then whitens his face with chalk and splotches it with blood. "The streak across the eye was not forgotten, and presented a most shocking appearance."

This spectral masquerade anticipates, in a sense, *The Masque of the Red Death*. The dead man returns to avenge himself on his murderer and, strangely enough, with the same characteristics which Poe, as a child, must have observed in his consumptive mother: "the swollen stomach" and the chalky face with its red splotches. Even the "convulsions" in which Rogers dies, suggest the throes of childbirth. It is as though Poe was forced to transfer to every corpse the attributes of his dying mother.¹

Be that as it may, Pym, thus disguised, creeps with his friends to the cabin companion-way. Through cracks in the cabin partition, they see the eight men of the opposite camp armed to the teeth. They are not as intoxicated as usual and earnestly discuss their plans and, especially, Peters. The mate is heard to say that: "he could not understand his being so much forward with the captain's brat in the fore-castle, and he thought the sooner both of them were overboard the better", after which he orders both to be sent for and greets them with feigned cordiality. This permits Peters to turn the talk on ghosts. "The mate was evidently much agitated, and presently, when someone mentioned the terrific appearance of Rogers' corpse, I thought he was on the point of swooning." Peters then asks whether it would not be better for the corpse to be thrown overboard, but no one dares stir, so great is the terror aroused by his tales. Then, at his signal, Pym-Rogers appears.

The effect of the apparition is overwhelming. The lateness of the hour, the storm, the murderer's remorse and the flickering, uncertain light, combine to strengthen the terrifying illusion. "The mate sprang up from the mattress on which he was lying, and, without uttering a syllable, fell

¹ Hervey Allen (*Israfel*, p. 96) tells of an episode in Poe's youth at Richmond, where he masqueraded as a ghost to frighten a party of friends.

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back, stone dead, upon the cabin floor. . .” Of the remaining seven, four are killed by the herculean Peters, one by Augustus with a musket he finds at hand, while Pym knocks Parker senseless. Subsequently the latter begs to be spared and joins the victors. Tiger, escaped from his *coffin*, kills Jones by biting his throat as the latter is about to dispatch Augustus, whom he has repeatedly stabbed in the arm. “Thus, in far less time than I have taken to tell it, we found ourselves masters of the brig.”

“It was now about one o’clock in the morning, and the wind was still blowing tremendously.” In fact, the labouring vessel was shipping a sea at almost every roll. The larboard bulwarks were swept away and the “creaking and working” of the mainmast showed that it, too, must soon yield. Now only three men remain to work the pumps, for Augustus’s wounds make him well-nigh useless. Day comes and the survivors cast the corpses overboard. They also cut away the mainmast. To increase their distress the heavy seas so displace the ballast as to render the pumps useless. The longboat and starboard bulwarks are then carried away and the windlass shattered. By the next night the ship has settled to the orlop deck and the rudder is torn away. Finally the tremendous seas sweep the deck clear and fill every inch of the vessel. It is now but a drifting hulk, its decks level with the sea, preserved from sinking only by its cargo of empty oil-casks. The four men then lash themselves flat on deck to the remnants of the windlass, “encircled with a towering ridge of foam, a portion of which swept over us every instant”. Thus they await the dawn of a new day.

* * *

Let us now interrupt our narrative to discover, if we can, something of its deeper meaning. Admittedly, we cannot hope for the precision of an analysis supported by the patient’s associations as they arise in the course of a psycho-analysis. The absence of these vital associations must make itself felt and much, as a result, must ever remain obscure.

Our analyses of living patients, however, have in fact enabled us to unravel some of the laws that govern the unconscious, and decipher certain of the psyche’s hieroglyphs, and it is these which justify us in applying our conclusions from the living to the dead. For the dead once lived and were subject to similar psychic and physical laws as ourselves, their successors; thus the symbols we employ were also theirs, as for instance, those which derive from the sea. Further, what we know of a man’s life throws light on his work and, as we saw, our knowledge of

Poe's life is fairly complete. We may justifiably, therefore, seek to interpret Poe's opus in the light of information drawn from psycho-analysis.

First be it noted that, from beginning to end, only men appear in this tale, as might, however, be expected in a sea-story. Yet, as we shall see, the whole content of this story—as it was of Poe's life—is the ardent and frenzied search—ever frustrated, ever renewed—for the lost mother: a mother, always hidden, always present and made manifest here in those vast and universal symbols whose significance is unconsciously sensed by man. It is from this, in fact, that the tale draws its effect, for were this emotive factor absent, it would seem but a tissue of horrors and impossible events.

We begin by asking what significance must be attributed, in Poe's unconscious, to Pym's confinement in the *Grampus's* hold; that, as he says: "scarcely seaworthy old hulk"? Maybe we have here an allusion, in symbolic and disparaging terms, to his mother's seriously undermined health when she was bearing Edgar? As we see, it is in the flanks of this unsound vessel that Pym finds himself shut, like the child in the womb; and the protracted, tortured story of his imprisonment there, corresponds to what is frequently met in psycho-analysis; namely, *a womb-phantasy*, the morbid anxiety connected with which expresses its opposite, the wish. For as Freud says: "It may be added that for a man who is impotent (that is, who is inhibited by the threat of castration) the substitute for copulation is a phantasy of returning into his mother's womb".¹ Poe impotent, must have been specially prone to this phantasy, so admirably expressed in the premature-burial situations he so frequently depicts. Pym, too, compares himself to one buried alive.²

Throughout this tale, may not Pym's torturing hunger and worse, his thirst, re-echo unconscious memories, no doubt greatly amplified—as all such childish memories are—of a time when the penniless, phthisical actress's children suffered similar hunger and thirst; thirst above all for the failing breast? And doubtless we have here one reason why these descriptions of his hunger and thirst are so especially moving.

All this, of course, is condensed into single episodes. Even when Pym

¹ "Ich füge hier an, dass die Phantasie der Rückkehr in den Mutterleib der Koitus-Ersatz des Impotenten (durch die Kastrationsdrohung Gehemmten) ist." *Hemmung, Symptom und Angst*, 1926: *Ges. Werke*, Band XIV. *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, London, The Hogarth Press, and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis 1936, p. 110.

² Cf. page 304.

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lies hidden in the hold, like a foetus in the womb, we see him already suffer the tortures of weaning, already relishing the rough, manly pleasure of drink, eventual substitute for the mother's milk. Thus, as we see, the unconscious cares little for time relations and facts are juxtaposed irrespective of time, provided the emotional link is present; in this case, that of the mother who protected and fed the child. So too, the mother may continue to dwell in the unconscious in various contradictory forms as, for instance, when she appears with her dreaded teeth in the shape of the dog Tiger inside her own womb, symbolised by the ship's hold, which again, as the *sea*, she is rocking.

Pym's problem here is how to issue from this womb in which he is imprisoned; how to get himself reborn. The trap-door by which he entered is closed and he seems doomed to eternal darkness and death, that death which is yet another phantasy of return to the womb and even more so when the mother is dead. Nevertheless, Augustus comes to seek him: Augustus, the elder brother, who shares the victuals Peters provides. Pym's rebirth, therefore, takes place under the auspices of men, just when his last drop of liqueur is swallowed after the mother-animal, Tiger, was shut in its coffin.

But here another motif reappears, that of *rebellion against the father*. Pym's grandfather has already been left ashore, eliminated despite his menacing umbrella, when Pym sets off to conquer the sea. And now it is the Grampus's captain, Mr. Barnard, who is wounded, manacled, dispossessed and abandoned at sea, as though it is he who must be punished for the crime of the Penguin's captain in wishing to let Pym and Augustus perish when the Ariel was wrecked at sea.

Although neither Pym nor Augustus take part in the mutiny on the Grampus, we have here the classical "Œdipal" revolt, as indeed is every revolution, since the dethroned king, to his rebellious subjects, is always the father they dispossess; the father, in fact, we knew as children and from whom we wished to seize the mother. It is that same old, tyrannical and cruel father whom, in the dawn of humanity, the brothers of the primal horde conspired to kill that, as we are told by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, they might seize his wives and so the mother. Here the vessel, a mother-symbol, becomes the conspirators' prize.

Barely have they secured their booty, however, when the "brothers" find themselves at odds. The mutineers thus split into two camps, their leaders the mate and cook. But the mate soon proves to be another form of the wicked father, for fathers are hard to kill and go on being resuscitated, for each and everyone of us, in all the father-representatives

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life chances to place in our way. Yet though Mr. Barnard—like David Poe, who disappeared so early from his son's life—may be shown as weak and incapable as, for instance, in stowing his cargo, the mate, whose name Pym does not give, seems to be copied from the dour John Allan, though painted considerably blacker! He drinks, he is tyrannical and evil, poisons Rogers and plots to kill Augustus and Peters. Thus, it would be natural to rebel against such a man. The cook, who despatches twenty-two men with his axe, as might be expected, goes over to and becomes, as it were, his double. After which they and their accomplices die together, with Parker alone excepted.

Worth closer examination is the form of this second rebellion against the father. Who, in effect, does the killing? First, the father-mate falls dead by no human intervention, the victim of his remorse for killing a son and of his evil intentions. He dies by a sort of retribution—the talion law—a mechanical *taboo* such as those in which primitives believe. He being eliminated, it is Peters who despatches the most men: namely four. Another is killed by the dog and one by Augustus; Pym attacks Parker but does not kill him.

Augustus, who “takes the sword” will “perish by the sword” (in this case the gun). The primitive law of retribution will exact its due from him also and he will not survive his wound. The dog vanishes and Pym and Peters will be left the sole survivors; Pym, who is guiltless of killing and Peters, who, in the second uprising, killed most and also took part in the first. The question therefore arises why Peters is spared this retribution and why the expiations which follow—for to the unconscious their subsequent sufferings are such—suffice to buy his *redemption*, as they do Pym's, whose hands, if not intentions, are innocent of blood?

The answer doubtless is, that the half-breed Peters, whose oddities and appearance resemble the monsters drawn by children, nevertheless stands for someone important in the parricidal brother-horde. His grotesque form, his *Herculean* strength (the word is Poe's), and fierceness, all represent, though in degraded form, the “hero” of mythology.¹ Of the three, Pym, Peters and Augustus, who together recapture the vessel, he alone it is who takes on himself both the glory and guilt of the killings; he strangles one mutineer, beats out the brains of another and kills two more. Later, as we shall see, he commits another murder and for a far more horrible reason. . . The potency-less Pym-Poe would never have dared all this.

¹ Cf. Rank, *op. cit.*, page 269, note 1.

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Again, Peters kills *as a saviour*, in a sense *with good motives*: it is thanks to his short and muscular hands that Pym and Augustus escape their intended doom at the hands of the mate. He enacts, in little, the deeds of mythological heroes; he frees the sons from the dreaded and, what they consider, unjust tyranny of the fathers; he takes on himself the responsibility for the blood spilt and, once that blood has been spilt, he must expiate the guilt before, like all "heroes", he can win redemption. So Hercules, after killing the Hydra and performing his deeds, perished in flames and was elevated amid the Immortals.

The flames in Peters' case is his ship. This ship, this mother-symbol, which occasions his killings, becomes the instrument of his torments and expiation. So, too, the fatal shirt prepared by Nessus, was given to Hercules by Dejanira. We frequently find that the coveted and guilt-won object becomes itself the instrument of expiation. Nor is it by chance that the mother so often appeared to Poe, with her dread teeth, in warning, nor that every ship on which Pym sailed—all mother-symbols—foundered. Like Metzengerstein, bound fast to his dreadful steed, like the Wild Huntsman, eternally doomed to the saddle of his symbolic horse to expiate his excessive passion for hunting, Peters and his three brothers will be cruelly nailed to the deck of the sinking vessel he has captured.

One may hark back here to the many shipwrecks which fill the literature of Poe's day, a subject also often depicted in contemporary painting. There is, for instance, that in Byron's *Don Juan*, to mention one poem and, among paintings, Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*. However fashionable this subject may then have been at a time when romanticism ran riot and lauded the instincts freed from the classical yoke, the theme of the vessel in distress is nevertheless, timeless, and was doubtless born the day man first stepped into a canoe. Even then, the eternal symbolism of navigation, of the dread conquest of the sea-mother by man, must have filled the first sailor's soul with awe and exultation.

From this same symbolism, also, derive the strange myths in which the sailor is eternally doomed to "ride" his vessel, because he loved it too well (like the Wild Huntsman bound to his steed); the source of his erotic pleasure thus becoming that of his torment and anxiety. Myths seem instinctively aware of what clinical observation has established; namely, that the frustration of sexual desires by moral bans often converts them into neurotic anxiety. Indeed, myths seem to have sensed the origins of anxiety better than any authority before Freud.

Of all these sea-stories in fashion at the time, one poem, however,

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deserves especial mention: Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.¹ As the reader will recall, the Mariner stops a wedding guest on his way to the feast and proceeds to tell a fearful tale which binds a spell on the listener. His vessel had been driven by storms far off its course into the southern ocean. Ice-floes, desolate, phantasmagoric, then close about the ship and imprison it in a frozen, lifeless world. Yet one albatross does alight on the rigging and is fed by the crew. As though the bird was their genius, the ice opens and the ship is free to sail north. But the Ancient Mariner, in what Poe would have called a "fit of perverseness", kills the bird with his crossbow. Whereupon, a dead calm follows and the rest of the crew (the brother-horde) of whom the Mariner—since he alone has assumed responsibility for this murder—is the "hero", now begin to murmur against him.

"Ah, wretch!" said they, 'the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow'."

Yet, later, in different mood, we find they condone the deed:

"'Twas right,' said they, 'such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist'."

We thus see the albatross held responsible both for the weather, and for the ship's progress, much in the way that governments, when food is scarce, are held guilty for a bad harvest. The albatross, a totem creature generally regarded with superstitious awe by sailors, seems here, in its totem-aspect, to be identified with the ship's captain. The killing of the albatross, therefore, would be identical with the crime of which Peters is guilty, as regards the mate, save that the mate dies automatically, which thus attenuates the crime. In each case the crime is the Oedipus crime of parricide: the murder of the father by him who becomes the hero in acquitting the brothers of the task. But, in the *Ancient Mariner*, the brother-horde views the deed with increasing ire, the longer their agonies of hunger and thirst continue. Finally, as token of his guilt, the albatross's body is hung round the murderer's neck.

And now the phantom ship appears upon which Death, and Life-in-Death, throw dice for the crew's lives. Life-in-Death wins the Ancient Mariner and Death the others. One by one the sailors fall to the deck, each, with his dying look, cursing the Mariner. Though dead, their eyes are open and, night and day, he sees their curse upon him. In his ears, the

¹ See page 216, note 1.

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spirits of the air whisper the penance required by the Polar spirit, the penance exacted by the mother-ship on which he is sole survivor and which—thanks, in fact, to his crime—he now alone possesses. Meanwhile, aided by spirits, the vessel sails on and brings him to his native shore, once more the symbol of the mother. The ship sinks and a hermit (another father figure) confesses the murderer and washes away “the Albatross’s blood”. The Œdipus crime is still, however, not wholly expiated, for the Mariner, in eternal penance, is doomed to the *urge to confess*, which irresistible impulse time and again compels him to relate his crime.

This, then, is the *Ancient Mariner* version of the typical Œdipus crime, expressed as a sea-story. Gleams of the stupendous background against which this tragedy takes place also light the horizons towards which our minor “hero” Peters, and Poe-Pym, are now drifting.

* * *

The expiation to be made by Peters—the hero of the crime—and his accomplices, has begun. It will be remembered that Peters, Pym and the wounded Augustus were left lashed to the remnants of the windlass on the brig’s deck, now a mere hulk, incessantly swept by great waves. Parker, sole survivor of the mate’s (and so *father’s*) camp, is in the same wretched plight; it is as though the three conspirators had only spared him from the general slaughter, that fate might play him a yet crueller trick.

“In this frightful situation we lay until the day broke so as to show us more fully the horrors which surrounded us. The brig was a mere log, rolling about at the mercy of every wave; the gale was upon the increase. . . By the mercy of God, however, we were preserved from these imminent dangers, and about midday were cheered by the light of the blessed sun. Shortly afterward we could perceive a sensible diminution in the force of the wind, when, now for the first time since the latter part of the evening before, Augustus spoke, asking Peters, who lay closest to him, if he thought there was any possibility of our being saved. As no reply was at first made to this question, we all concluded that the hybrid had been drowned where he lay; but presently, to our great joy, he spoke, although very feebly, saying that he was in great pain, being so cut by the tightness of his lashings across his stomach, that he must either find means of loosening them or perish, as it was impossible that he could endure his misery much longer.”

Situated as they are, however, it is impossible to relieve him.

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By degrees, the gale diminishes and Pym falls into a state of partial insensibility, full of dreams in which motion was the predominant idea. He sees "troops of cavalry . . . ships, large birds, balloons, people on horseback, carriages driving furiously"—in short, all manner of objects which reproduce the speed with which he is being borne.

When he comes to himself, the sun is an hour high and the sea calm. With a penknife which he manages to take from his pantaloons pocket, Pym cuts the lashings with which he and his companions are bound.

The morning of the fourteenth at length dawns, after the trio have been without food or drink for "better than three entire days and nights", and it has become imperative to make an effort to salvage stores from the cabin.

Thus again, we find expressed the theme of the child weaned of a wasting mother, which, in the unconscious, this wreck clearly represents. And again the hero is Peters, for it is he who, after many vain efforts to fish up something edible or useful with a drag made of bits of wood and nails, suggests they "should fasten a rope to his body, and let him make an attempt to get up something by diving into the cabin". Follows one of those "impotence nightmares" that Poe so uniquely describes, for each of his four attempts fail. First, he is only able to penetrate a short distance into the narrow, flooded passage; next his signal rope is entangled in the balustrade at the foot of the ladder and he is almost drowned: his third attempt also fails and his fourth, though he reaches the store-room, results in him finding it locked. So too, in infancy, the little Edgar would have found himself barred from the mother's breast.

"Shortly afterwards an incident occurred . . . replete with the extremes first of delight and then of horror . . . I . . . shall never forget the ecstatic joy which thrilled through every particle of my frame, when I perceived a large brig bearing down upon us, and not more than a couple of miles off. . . The vessel in sight was a large hermaphrodite brig, of a Dutch build, and painted black, with a tawdry gilt figure-head. She had evidently seen a good deal of rough weather, and, we supposed, had suffered much in the gale which had proved so disastrous to ourselves; for her foretopmast was gone, and some of her starboard bulwarks. . ."

Yet, in spite of the gentle breeze, she carried but little sail, and so

"came down but slowly, and our impatience amounted nearly to phrensy. The awkward manner in which she steered, too, was remarked by all of us, even excited as we were. She yawed about so considerably"

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towards and away from the wreck, that the castaways are sent into transports of alternate hope and despair.

“No person was seen upon her decks until she arrived within a quarter of a mile of us. We then saw three seamen, whom by their dress we took to be Hollanders. Two of these were lying on some old sails near the forecastle, and the third, who appeared to be looking at us with great curiosity, was leaning over the starboard bow near the bowsprit. This last was a stout and tall man, with a very dark skin. He seemed by his manner to be encouraging us to have patience, nodding to us in a cheerful although rather odd way, and smiling constantly, so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth. As his vessel drew nearer, we saw a red flannel cap which he had on fall from his head into the water; but of this he took little or no notice, continuing his odd smiles and gesticulations.”

The brig comes slowly on, and of a sudden “there came wafted over the ocean from the strange vessel . . . a smell, a stench, such as the whole world has no name for”. Then a wide yaw brings the brig round, she passes about twenty feet off the stern of the wreck, and

“ . . . we had a full view of her decks. Shall I ever forget the triple horror of that spectacle? Twenty-five or thirty human bodies, among whom were several females, lay scattered about between the counter and the galley in the last and most loathsome state of putrefaction. We plainly saw that not a soul lived in that fated vessel! Yet we could not help shouting to the dead for help!”

From the vessel comes an answering cry, and another sudden yaw brings its foc’sle into view, so that they see the back of the figure leaning on the bulwark.

“His arms were extended over the rail, and the palms of his hands fell outward. His knees were lodged upon a stout rope. . . On his back, from which a portion of the shirt had been torn, leaving it bare, there sat a huge seagull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood. As the brig moved further round so as to bring us close in view, the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and, after eyeing us for a moment as if stupefied, arose lazily from the body upon which it had been feasting, and, flying directly above our deck hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak. The horrid morsel dropped at length with a sullen splash immediately at the feet of Parker. May God forgive me, but now, for the first time, there flashed through my mind a thought,

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a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step towards the ensanguined spot. I looked upward, and the eyes of Augustus met my own with a degree of intense and eager meaning which immediately brought me to my senses. I sprang forward quickly, and, with a deep shudder threw the frightful thing into the sea."

Relieved of the gull's weight, the man's body, as it rests on the rope, swings round and falls partially over, so that its face may be seen. "Never, surely, was any object so terribly full of awe! The eyes were gone, and the whole flesh around the mouth, leaving the teeth utterly naked." Then the brig slowly passes out of sight of the despairing castaways.

What calamity could have befallen this crew, here wonders the narrator? Yellow fever? Or poison, accidentally introduced into the ship's stores? Or eating "some unknown venomous species of fish, or other marine animal, or oceanic bird . . . but it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain forever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery".

Such is the episode of the Death-Ship as we find it in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Apart from its element of horror, solely inspired, as some might think, by the romanticism of Poe's time, its deep impressiveness primarily derives from Poe's own horror, a horror innate in the depths of his being. For Poe used the form and imagery of the sea-stories, in fashion at the time, to give utterance to buried and unconscious memories of the pangs he suffered when he was weaned, first by sickness and then by death, of his mother's milk and her presence. Poe might well have said, with Molière: "*Il m'est permis de reprendre mon bien où je le trouve*."¹ (I have the right to retake my own where I find it)". It is because something of what was deepest in Poe could be expressed by way of the symbolism of shipwreck, a current theme at the time, that this story was written, and is read to-day.

Is there not an echo here of the anguish the small boy felt at the aspect of his failing mother, in the questions anent the sickness, the mysterious "poison", which transforms the brig, with its crew, from a ship of life into a death-ship? And may we not find confirmation of the symbolic connection between the ship with its stench of putrefaction, and the dead and decomposing mother, in the fact that *female* corpses

¹ *Collection des Grands Écrivains de la France*, Molière, Tome VIII, Paris, Hachette, 1883, p. 397. Preface to *Les Fourberies de Scapin* in which this is quoted by the editors of Molière from Grimarest, *La Vie de M. de Molière*, Paris, 1705.

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are mentioned as among the putrefying corpses on deck. There is nothing in the text to imply the presence of women on board, it is even a surprise to find them there, but evidently the detail was dictated by the unconscious. And again, where do we find these corpses, which include women, lying? "Between the counter and the galley." Some reason evidently determined this mention of the galley: presumably because exaggerated forms of hunger and thirst, (*oral anxiety*), are part and parcel of the mother complex. This anxiety, in Poe, would doubtless have been extreme, given his mother's failing health and the poverty which, herself unable to feed them, would not allow the adequate feeding of her children.

This mother, who can no longer feed her children, we now find doubly determined; first, as the wreck with its locked storeroom which yields nothing to eat, then by the brig of false hope and death, where the only, abominable, food is the flesh of the crew, on which a gull feasts and drops a horrible morsel at the feet of the castaways.

* * *

It is fitting here to revert to what has been said about the development of the human libido,¹ that mysterious urge which demands sensuous satisfaction and discharge and which, from birth, develops as part and parcel of our prime needs, beginning with the first, that of obtaining nourishment. This *oral erotic* stage is the first phase in libido development. The babe not only loves its milk and the mother's breast for the nourishment they offer, but for the sucking pleasures given the mucous membranes of the mouth. Both pleasures, originally undifferentiated, split off later, more or less, into the pleasure of drinking and the purely erotic pleasure of kissing. Soon, however, with the first teeth, appears the instinct to bite. While the first oral erotic phase is characterized by sucking pleasure, the second, marked by the appearance of the first teeth—not that sucking pleasure is abandoned—is characterized by the new pleasure of biting. It is this phase of libido development which Abraham has so aptly termed the *cannibalistic* phase. Many a mother who has suckled her child into this period, will have felt the proof on her breasts; it is only the child's helplessness which prevents it fulfilling its cannibal wishes to bite and eat the breast.

It is as though, in accordance with Haeckel's biogenetic law, the developing child recapitulates the whole of humanity's past and so works through the cannibal stage through which our forerunners must have

¹ Pages 218-9, on Berenice's teeth and the *vagina dentata*.

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passed. This "cannibal" desire for the breast is then, more or less, consciously transferred to other portions of the mother's body and then, to the bodies of other beings: in the case of the son this, especially, would be the father, as the next nearest and most hated, though also most loved and admired. The feasts of primitive peoples where the totem is eaten, whose traces survive in many religions—"Take ye: this is my body . . . my blood"—doubtless commemorate the cannibal feasts of the sons of the primal horde, once they had killed the father.

In this episode of the death-ship, the transference of the child's cannibal wishes from the mother to the father is already indicated. For it is a male body on which the gull feasts, the gull with which Pym for a moment almost identifies himself when he all but devours the piece of flesh it drops on the deck. Later, we shall see why this bleeding morsel should fall precisely at Parker's feet. On this occasion Pym rejects the temptation, and flings the "frightful thing" into the sea.

Having resisted his cannibal desires, the famished Pym now experiences what in psycho-analysis is termed *regression*. From the second or cannibal oral phase he regresses to the earlier phase of sucking, when the still toothless babe sucked and drank from its mother. But now the sinister mother-brig is too distant to be reached, even by their wild plan of swimming as, in the same way, the mother's corpse was carried away from her child, thus renewing and intensifying his original weaning *trauma*. It thus becomes imperative for the child to find some sort of drink in place of the missing milk, something that will more than satisfy hunger and thirst and, at the same time, gratify its erotic urges. Appropriately, therefore, the recurrent theme of alcohol and drunkenness reappears here.

Peters, Parker and Pym now make numerous but vain attempts to fish up something edible from the wreck's interior and finally Pym manages to retrieve a bottle of Port wine. All four drink, and, "each taking a moderate sup", they feel "the most indescribable comfort from the warmth, strength, and spirits" with which it inspires them. Subsequent attempts, however, prove fruitless, except for a small leather trunk which Pym manages to bring up. Just before this, Pym's "brothers" have treacherously drunk his share of the Port, and thus his only remaining substitute for the mother's milk is taken from him.

Whereupon, the "brothers", exceedingly intoxicated, fall into the deep sleep characteristic of replete babes while Pym, to all intents and purposes "alone in the brig", gloomily reflects on the likelihood of their imminent death either by starvation or drowning.

Tortured by hunger, Pym now attempts to eat a small piece of the

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leather trunk, but is utterly unable "to swallow a single morsel". Soon his companions wake "in an indescribable state of weakness and horror, brought on by the wine, whose fumes had now evaporated. They shook as if with a violent ague, and uttered the most lamentable cries for water . . ." that water which, it seems, wine can no more replace than it can milk! Remembering that he himself had been saved from a similar condition by his immersions when fishing for victuals, Pym gets his companions to plunge into the flooded companion-way, an idea he says, which was suggested to him "by reading in some medical work the good effect of the shower-bath in a case where the patient was suffering from *mania-à-potu*". Sober again, the castaways make fresh efforts to fish up something edible, but the ship goes on refusing to feed its children who, at last, in despair, abandon their efforts.

The morning of the sixteenth dawns without having brought relief.

"This was the sixth day since we had tasted either food or drink, with the exception of the bottle of Port wine. . . I never saw before . . . human beings so utterly emaciated as Peters and Augustus. . . Parker, although sadly reduced . . . was not so far gone as the other two. . . For myself . . . I suffered less than any of us, being much less reduced in frame, and retaining my powers of mind in a surprising degree, while the rest were completely prostrated in intellect, and seemed to be brought to a species of second childhood, generally simpering in their expressions, with idiotic smiles, and uttering the most absurd platitudes."

It is in this state of "second childhood" that the sufferers are deluded first by a mirage of land and then, by the sight of a ship which eventually sails from them. After they have tried, in vain, to swallow some scraps of leather, these men resolutely turn to a deed which, in effect, enacts the second of the infant's oral erotic phases.

For when the sail they have sighted disappears, bearing every hope away with it:

"Parker turned suddenly towards me with an expression of countenance which made me shudder. There was about him an air of self-possession which I had not noticed in him until now, and before he opened his lips my heart told me what he would say. He proposed, in a few words, that one of us should die to preserve the existence of the others."

Pym now begs Parker to abandon his scheme and not to mention it to the others. A struggle follows, in which Parker seeks to stab Pym, who then strives to throw him over the ship's side. They are separated by

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Peters, but he and Augustus, hearing Parker's scheme, insist that it be effected. With great difficulty, Pym persuades them to wait an hour for, should the fog lift, the just-seen ship might again come in sight. If not, they would draw lots for the victim. The fog lifts, but no vessel is in sight.

Pym now describes his bitter anxiety while preparing the splinters that are to decide his fate. Peters draws first—and is spared, as is Augustus. Pym then, "with a convulsive shudder and closed eyes", holds out the two remaining splinters. Parker draws the shorter and Pym falls senseless.

"I recovered from my swoon in time to behold the consummation of the tragedy in the death of him who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing it about. He made no resistance whatever, and was stabbed in the back by Peters, when he fell instantly dead. I must not dwell upon the fearful repast which immediately ensued. Such things may be imagined, but words have no power to impress the mind with the exquisite horror of their reality. Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet and head, throwing them, together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body, piecemeal, during the four ever-memorable days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of the month."

Thus the three "brothers", banded together, Peters, Pym and Augustus, consummate the crime. The ritual recalls the killing and communal eating of the totem object practised by primitive peoples, which re-enacts the murder and eating of the father of the primal horde, as reconstructed by Freud, following Darwin and Robertson Smith, in his *Totem and Taboo*. Responsibility and guilt for the deed are reduced, by being shared by all the members of the brother-horde, who thus support and exculpate each other. In this case, Parker, who instigated the crime, becomes its victim, as though by the law of talion. Now we understand why the gull dropped the bloody fragment at Parker's feet. Parker survives from the mutinous camp of the mate; something of the guilt for this mutiny clings to him still, and he is punished in that wherein they sinned. Thus, Kronos after castrating Uranos, his father, must suffer the same fate from his son Zeus. In the fulness of time, the crime of the sons against the father, is visited on them by their sons.

In this episode, though a communal affair, Peters, who was also originally of the mate's camp but then was converted to "goodness", somewhat resembles the mythic "hero" or doer of the crime. For it is he who plunges the knife into Parker's back.

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Again, the manner in which parts of the victim are set aside and thrown overboard, suggests a parallel with the ancient rites of setting aside portions of sacrificial victims to the gods, so little changed are the deep and eternal themes which dwell in the unconscious of primitive, as of civilized, peoples. The sole difference is that civilized man, as for instance Poe, is content to *phantasy* what his primitive ancestors *enacted*: deeds which, to-day, only the socially maladjusted criminal carries out.

* * *

The castaways apparently suffer no remorse for their cannibal crime, of which no more is heard. Yet the crime will be avenged on one of them and, again, in retributive form.

Meanwhile, our unfortunates, who have had nothing to ease their Port-exacerbated thirst but the blood of their comrade, derive some relief from a little rain they manage to catch in a sheet. All through this tale of the sea, *fresh* water is always drink *in excelsis*, which nothing else can replace. This is, indeed, so. But to Poe, in his unconscious, as undoubtedly to most, water also symbolised his first fluid sustenance, the mother's milk, as will clearly appear at the end of this tale.

With this symbolism in mind, it need not surprise us that Pym (a little late in the day, seeing that Parker is already eaten!) recollects he has left an axe in the foc'sle and, with this, manages to chop an entry into the store-room. Here he finds a female tortoise of the Gallipago breed which, *mother-like*, bears a supply of sweet water, in a bag, at the root of its neck. This water is carefully drawn off and helps to relieve their thirst. The tortoise they thus "milk" and whose flesh they dry and eat later, proves a far greater treasure than the Madeira, the jars of olives and the ham, which they fish up at the same time.

Now, however, a stiff gale rises and warnings of retribution for the murder, and cannibal feast, appear in the form of ferocious sharks that dog their hulk. The waves stave in the store-room partitions and the remaining provisions are swept into the hold; thirst tortures them again; their only relief is to swim alongside in spite of the menacing sharks. "Augustus's wounded arm" however "began to evince symptoms of mortification. He complained of drowsiness and excessive thirst, but no acute pain. . . We . . . trebled his allowance of water."

Their woes continue: "An enormous shark kept close by the hulk during the whole of the forenoon . . . Augustus much worse". . . It is then decided to kill and cut up the tortoise. Some of the meat they eat, and pickle the rest. Augustus, who appears to be dying, by common consent,

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is allowed all the water they collect in a brisk shower of rain. This he drinks from the sheet as they catch it. But . . .

“The sufferer seemed to derive but little benefit from the draught. His arm was completely black from the wrist to the shoulder, and his feet were like ice. We expected every moment to see him breathe his last. He was frightfully emaciated; so much so that, although he weighed a hundred and twenty-seven pounds upon his leaving Nantucket, he now did not weigh more than *forty or fifty at the farthest*. His eyes were sunk far into his head, being scarcely perceptible, and the skin of his cheeks hung so loosely as to prevent his masticating any food, or even swallowing any liquid, without great difficulty.”

Thus Augustus will die of his wound, for “they that take the sword shall perish with the sword”. In addition, Augustus who ate of Parker’s flesh will, in his turn, be eaten. Certain features in this description must already have been familiar to Poe. Had he not, a few years earlier, seen Henry, his own brother, thus waste away and die, of consumption, on 1st August, 1831, in the room they shared under Mrs. Clemm’s roof. Surely his was that horribly emaciated body, those hanging cheeks and sunken eyes, which the dying Augustus now turns on his “brother” Pym.

Thus, a host of infantile complexes are reactivated, among which jealousy of the brother. Pym, in effect, watches his elder brother and rival disappear; he who so wickedly urged him to run away to the sea-mother. It is upon Augustus that the burden of and retribution for the crime fall, while Pym is miraculously spared as will be Peters the “hero”.

“We now saw clearly that Augustus could not be saved; that he was evidently dying. . . About twelve o’clock he expired in strong convulsions. . . It was not until some time after dark that we took courage to get up and throw the body overboard. It was then loathsome beyond expression, and so far decayed that, as Peters attempted to lift it, an entire leg came off in his grasp.”

(Thus, the punishment of symbolic castration is not even spared Augustus, the blood-guilty brother, when he is dead.) Then:

“As the mass of putrefaction slipped over the vessel’s side into the water, the glare of phosphoric light with which it was surrounded”
(the phosphorescent light around the House of Usher also symbolised decay and putrefaction)

“plainly discovered to us seven or eight large sharks, the clashing of whose horrible teeth, as their prey was torn to pieces among them, might have been heard at the distance of a mile”.

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Thus the sea-mother reclaims her guilty son, while the sea-denizens, the sharks, tear him to bits with their teeth, so representing not only the brothers at the cannibal feast but, at a still deeper level of the unconscious, those dreadful teeth of the mother which Poe was to fear throughout life.

And now, since the Œdipus crime has been expiated by Augustus, a change for the better may occur. Peters and Pym are alone, still tormented by hunger and thirst, but the hulk overturns and the sea-mother becomes once more kind and nurturing, for its bottom and keel are "*thickly covered with large barnacles, which proved to be excellent and highly nutritious food*", and they also find small crabs in the sea-weed that drifts by. The sharks disappear, rain falls and the clement sea, having nourished her starving infants, at last sends them succour in shape of a schooner.

* * *

"The Jane Guy was a fine-looking topsail schooner of a hundred and eighty tons burden." She had sailed from Liverpool to seal and trade in the South Seas. Her master

"Captain Guy was a gentleman of great urbanity of manner, and of considerable experience in the southern traffic, . . . He was deficient, however, in energy, and consequently, in that spirit of enterprise which is here so absolutely requisite."

In Captain Guy, we recognise another incompetent father of the type of Captain Barnard.

"On board the Jane Guy we were treated with all the kindness our distressed situation demanded." A gale blows up and, when it is weathered, the schooner continues her course, passes Prince Edward's Island and the Crozets and eventually reaches Kerguelen or Desolation Island. Follows a description of this island, with a detailed account of the habits of both albatross and penguin, found there in profusion. The schooner then retraces its way west to call at Tristan d'Acunha, also described in its turn. Next, Captain Guy unsuccessfully seeks the legendary Auroras and, later, other islands said to lie further south.

"In the event of his not discovering these lands, he designed, should the season prove favourable, to push on towards the pole."

From this point, the spell of the South Pole hangs over the story. Poe, in his turn, is to launch out into those far southern waters in which the Ancient Mariner slew the albatross. Once before he had set out for these regions with the hero of the *MS. Found in a Bottle* who, contrary

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to Pym; does not return to tell the tale. But now it is not the final, all-engulfing maelström of the Pole he will describe, but a vast, fantastic region which his poet's imagination creates in expressing, in dazzling symbols, the deep complexes that charge his soul; symbols such as determine the most vivid dreams and nightmares.

And it was because the conquest of the Pole, to Poe, as to so many others, concealed a deep-hid mother-symbolism, that symbolism with which so much in nature is charged, that Reynolds' projected expedition so excited all America and found an echo in Poe. We know, indeed, that he devoted a number of articles to Reynolds' scheme¹ and that it was to Reynolds he called, when he lay dying in delirium, at Baltimore.

At this point, Pym interpolates an historical survey of Antarctic exploration to the date of Reynolds' voyage—and his own—in which Reynolds' name is frequently mentioned.

Now begins the Jane Guy's course to the South Pole. Always the sea is strewn with ice-bergs and blocked by floes which invariably, however, permit the schooner to pass while the temperature miraculously rises, although they are far further south than ever recorded. Vast flocks of birds fly overhead and a gigantic polar bear with blood-red eyes is seen on an ice-floe. Peters, again the hero, kills the bear, which the crew then eat. The animal seems in sort totemic for, barely is it sacrificed when land appears, almost as though it were its Cerberus which must be destroyed before land is won. So, too, the dragon was slain by Perseus to win Andromeda.

"Scarcely had we got our prize alongside, when the man at the masthead gave the joyful shout of '*land on the starboard bow*' . . . It proved to be a low rocky islet, of about a league in circumference, and altogether destitute of vegetation, if we except a species of prickly pear. . . . It did not take us long to explore every portion of the island, but, with one exception, we found nothing worthy of our observation. In the southern extremity, we picked up near the shore, half buried in a pile of loose stones, a piece of wood, which seemed to have formed the prow of a canoe. There had been evidently some attempt at carving upon it, and Captain Guy fancied that he made out the figure of a tortoise. . . ."

¹ *Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs*, etc. (*Southern Literary Messenger*, August 1836) and *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas*. (*Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1837. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 9, pp. 84 and 306).)

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The reader will doubtless recall the tortoise which furnished the cast-aways with "milk", and the fact that the marble prow of a ship surmounts the tomb of Frances Allan.

Still advancing southwards, the navigators for the first time perceive a strange phenomenon in the sky: "The sky was usually clear, with now and then a slight appearance of thin vapour in the southern horizon". Captain Guy, discouraged by his dwindling fuel, the symptoms of scurvy in the crew and his natural timidity, begins now to talk of turning back. Pym, however, "bursting with indignation at the timid and ill-timed suggestions of our commander", persuades him to push on.

* * *

"January 18. This morning we continued to the southward, with the same pleasant weather as before. The sea was entirely smooth, the air tolerably warm and from the north-east. . ."

Still wind and current drive the ship steadily south; animals and birds are seen—right whales and albatrosses.

"We also picked up a bush, full of red berries, like those of the hawthorn, and the carcass of a singular-looking land-animal. It was three feet in length, and but six inches in height, with four very short legs, the feet armed with long claws of a brilliant scarlet, and resembling coral in substance. The body was covered with a straight silky hair, perfectly white. The tail was peaked like that of a rat, and about a foot and a half long. The head resembled a cat's, with the exception of the ears—these were flapped like the ears of a dog. The *teeth*¹ were of the same brilliant scarlet as the claws."

This curious creature we shall meet again later. Without analysing them in detail, let us merely note its blood-red teeth and claws, its white fur—which presages the *whiteness* motif that later assumes so much importance, and the long tail and cat-head which, in some sort, match those of the *Black Cat*.

"January 19. To-day . . . (the sea being of an extraordinarily dark colour), we again saw land from the masthead, and, . . . found it to be one of a group of very large islands. The shore was precipitous, and the interior seemed to be well wooded . . . we came to anchor in ten fathoms, sandy bottom, a league from the coast. . . The two largest boats were now ordered out, and a party, well armed (among whom were Peters and myself), proceeded to look for an opening in the reef

¹The italics are Poe's.

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which appeared to encircle the island. After searching about for some time, we discovered an inlet, which we were entering, when we saw four large canoes put off from the shore, filled with men who seemed to be well armed. . . Captain Guy now held up a white handkerchief on the blade of an oar, when the strangers made a full stop, and commenced a loud jabbering all at once, intermingled with occasional shouts, in which we could distinguish the words *Anamoo-moo!* and *Lama-Lama!*

For, as will become apparent, *white* had all the qualities of a *taboo* to the natives of this isle and inspired them with both veneration and terror.

“In the four canoes . . . there were a hundred and ten savages in all. They were about the ordinary stature of Europeans, but of a more muscular and brawny frame. Their complexion was a jet black, with thick and long woolly hair. They were clothed in skins of an unknown black animal, shaggy and silky, and made to fit the body with some degree of skill, the hair being inside, except where turned out about the neck, wrists, and ankles. Their arms consisted principally of clubs, of a dark, and apparently very heavy wood. Some spears, however, were observed among them, headed with flint, and a few slings. The bottoms of the canoes were full of black stones about the size of a large egg.”

Thus, black is already indicated as the national emblem, as it were, of this unknown island and tribe.

The chief, whose name proves to be Too-wit, boards the Jane Guy with twenty men. When these have satisfied their curiosity, another twenty take their place, until all have visited the ship and examined everything in it with great inquisitiveness.

“It was quite evident that they had never before seen any of the white race—from whose complexion indeed they appeared to recoil. They believed the Jane to be a living creature, and seemed to be afraid of hurting it with the points of their spears, carefully turning them up.”

Too-wit even tries to comfort the vessel by patting and smoothing a gash which the cook, while chopping wood, has accidentally cut in the deck. Nor are they wholly in error for, throughout this tale, apart from being a means of transport, do not these ships (as in the unconscious of most of us) symbolise the mother who cradled us in infancy?

Be that as it may, certain objects alarm them greatly: “We could not get them to approach several very harmless objects—such as

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the schooner's sails, an egg, an open book, or a pan of flour" . . . all especially white objects. Too-wit's terror at seeing his reflection in the cabin mirrors, reminds us of Poe's apparent mirror-phobia: we shall meet it again in *William Wilson*.

The savages steal nothing and seem thoroughly well disposed. Surprisingly, "Gallipagos" tortoises and *bêche de mer*¹ abound in or near this Antarctic island and, despite Pym's eagerness to continue the voyage, it is resolved to remain a week and revictual the vessel.

The schooner, accordingly, guided by Too-wit on board, comes to anchor

"about a mile from the shore, in an excellent bay, completely land-locked, on the southeastern coast of the main island, and in ten fathoms of water, black sandy bottom. At the head of this bay there were three fine springs (we were told) of good water, and we saw abundance of wood in the vicinity. . . Too-wit . . . upon our dropping anchor, invited us to accompany him on shore, and visit his village in the interior. To this Captain Guy consented; and ten savages being left on board as hostages, a party of us, twelve in all, got in readiness to attend the chief."

Pym then continues:

"At every step we took inland the conviction forced itself upon us that we were in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilised men. We saw nothing with which we had been formerly conversant. The trees resembled no growth of either the torrid, the temperate, or the northern frigid zones, and were altogether unlike those of the lower southern latitudes we had already traversed. The very rocks were novel in their mass, their colour, and their stratification; and the streams themselves, utterly incredible as it may appear, had so little in common with those of other climates, that we were scrupulous of tasting them, and, indeed, had difficulty in bringing ourselves to believe that their qualities were purely those of nature. At a small brook which crossed our path (the first we had reached) Too-wit and his attendants halted to drink. On account of the singular character of the water, we refused to taste it, supposing it to be polluted; and it was not till some time afterward we came to understand that such was the appearance of the streams throughout the whole group. I am at a

¹ In French *bêche de mer*. Holothurians used for food, also known as *Bâlates* and *Trepangs*.

loss to give a distinct idea of the nature of this liquid, and cannot do so without many words. Although it flowed with rapidity in all declivities where common water would do so, yet never, except when falling in a cascade, had it the customary appearance of *limpidity*. It was, nevertheless, in point of fact, as perfectly limpid as any limestone water in existence, the difference being only in appearance. At first sight, and especially in cases where little declivity was found, it bore resemblance, as regards consistency, to a thick infusion of gum Arabic in common water. But this was only the least remarkable of its extraordinary qualities. It was *not* colorless, nor was it of any one uniform color—presenting to the eye, as it flowed, every possible shade of purple, like the hues of a changeable silk. This variation in shade was produced in a manner which excited as profound astonishment in the minds of our party as the mirror had done in the case of Too-wit. Upon collecting a basinful, and allowing it to settle thoroughly, we perceived that the whole mass of liquid was made up of a number of distinct veins, each of a distinct hue; that these veins did not commingle; and that their cohesion was perfect in regard to their own particles among themselves, and imperfect in regard to neighbouring veins. Upon passing the blade of a knife athwart the veins, the water closed over it immediately, as with us, and also, in withdrawing it, all traces of the passage of the knife were instantly obliterated. If, however, the blade was passed down accurately between the two veins, a perfect separation was effected, which the power of cohesion did not immediately rectify. The phenomena of this water formed the first definite link in that vast chain of apparent miracles with which I was destined to be at length encircled.”

This “water”, as we shall have no difficulty in recognising, represents *blood*. We are expressly told that it flowed in “veins”, while the land which differed “essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized man”, a land in which there was nothing with which they were formerly conversant is, on the contrary, that with which we are all conversant; namely, the body on whose blood we fed long before we were nourished by its milk: that of the mother in whose womb we were borne. Here the reader may be expected to object that our interpretations are monotonous in their repetition and always revert to the same themes. The fault, however, is not ours, but rather that of the human unconscious which, from its prehistoric past, draws up a few eternal themes on which to weave its innumerable variations. It need not, therefore, surprise us that the same basic themes re-emerge through the elaborated surfaces of these variations.

As for the island on which Pym the son, and Peters the hero, now

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disembark with the good but weak father, Captain Guy—and, as will later appear, the strong but crafty and wicked father, Too-wit—this is again anthropomorphised in the image of the mother's body and its streams of life-giving blood.

The distinctive feature of this island, however, is the colour *black*. In this, the mother's body appears as imagined *from within*, as it would appear to the foetus could it open its eyes and, by some strange light, see where it was. The whole appearance of the island and primitive village of Klock-Klock, in which the whites are received with every expression of friendliness though, in fact, with deep hostility, is predominantly black. The tents of the chief men of the tribe, *Wampoos* or *Yampoos*, consist of a tree stump "with a large black skin thrown over it, and hanging in loose folds upon the ground". The domestic animals include creatures resembling large hogs covered with a black fleece and, paradoxically enough, black albatross. The women of the tribe, though "straight, tall, and well-formed, with a grace and freedom of carriage not to be found in civilized society", are peculiar in that "their lips . . . like those of the men, were thick and clumsy, so that, even when laughing, the teeth were never disclosed". Yet, even could their teeth have been visible, no white would have appeared for, as we shall later learn, the natives' teeth, like their skins, are black. Thus, the appearance of these women's mouths, represents a displacement upwards to the mouth of qualities appropriate to the real or, rather, *cloacal* vagina as, for instance, its darkness and absence of *teeth*. In the same way, elsewhere in Poe's work, we see the contrary displacement effected, from above down, *i.e.*, from the mouth to the vagina; from which results the strange and terror-fraught concept of the *vagina dentata*. It is, in fact, the whiteness of the white men's *teeth* which most terrifies the blacks—with the terrible consequences that soon become apparent.

Too-wit, in fact, has only invited the whites to Klock-Klock, and provided an abundant though repulsive feast of palpitating entrails, to disarm their suspicions and prepare their destruction. He not only helps to revictual the ship but, in return for blue beads, knives and red (not white) cloth, aids Captain Guy's plans to exploit the abundant *bêche de mer*, by lending him men to erect the buildings to dry them. It is then agreed that three men shall be left behind to superintend the curing operations, after which the schooner will continue southwards. Too-wit, however, insists that Captain Guy and the crew pay him a formal visit of leave-taking.

Totally unsuspecting, the captain, with most of his men—thirty-two

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in all—set out, well-armed and on foot, to the village and leave only six men on board. A hundred “black skin warriors” escort them. Too-wit, when asked why they are unarmed, replies “there was no need of arms where all were brothers”. We shall soon see why, when we discover their purpose. As the party marches through a deep, winding gorge, whose walls “arose to an astonishing height, overshadowing the pass so completely that but little of the light of day could penetrate” Pym, Peters and a seaman named Allen, examining the “singular stratification of the precipice”, notice a “fissure in the soft rock”, wide enough “for one person to enter without squeezing” and of considerable height, which extends straight into the hill and then slopes leftwards. Pym, followed by his companions, enters the crevasse to pick nuts which resemble filberts that grow inside it. About to emerge, they are suddenly aware of a concussion “resembling nothing I had ever before experienced, which” says Pym, impressed him “with a vague conception . . . that the whole foundations of the solid globe were suddenly rent asunder. . . .” The savages, it appears, profiting by the stratifications in the soft rock and using stakes and ropes, have managed to loosen and lever off a vast mass of cliff which, falling, buries the whites and fills up the gorge.

* * *

“As soon as I could collect my scattered senses, I found myself nearly suffocated, and grovelling in utter darkness among a quantity of loose earth, which was also falling upon me in every direction, threatening to bury me entirely.”

Peters, he finds, is deeper embedded and Pym digs him out. But now a hideous anxiety grips them: that of being buried alive:

“... no incident ever occurring in the course of human events is more adapted to inspire the supremeness of mental and bodily distress than a case like our own, of living inhumation. The blackness of darkness which envelops the victim, the terrific oppression of lungs, the stifling fumes from the damp earth, unite with the ghastly considerations that we are beyond the remotest confines of hope, and that such is the allotted portion of *the dead*. . . .”

Thus, as we see, Pym’s and Peters’ entombment in the hillside, repeats the phantasy as regards the interior of the mother’s body, already expressed when Pym was first enclosed in the hold. But now the phantasy is far more ambitious, and the earth, its mountains and caves—and soon its far horizons—all subserve the poet’s imaginings, to express his yearning for the lost mother.

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Pym and Peters now grope about their prison and seek to ascertain the extent of their calamity. Almost immediately Pym perceives a glimmer of light. Struggling towards it, they reach a bend where the light is seen to come from a long seam, or crack, open to the sky. Pym now calls to mind that Allen is missing and they retrace their steps to seek him. They find him completely buried, only a protruding foot marking his living grave. They, therefore, painfully resume their difficult ascent of the moist, slippery soapstone which walls in the crack and, at last, reach "a natural platform, from which was perceptible a patch of blue sky, at the extremity of a thickly-wooded ravine". Here they rest, then push on up the ravine and reach "what might be called the surface of the ground". Through a narrow opening, a clear sight of the surrounding country appears and . . . "the whole dreadful secret of the concussion broke upon us in one moment and at one view". They observe that the ravine, for some distance, is filled with "more than a million tons of earth and stone that had been artificially tumbled within it". Along the top of the further side of the gorge, they see wooden stakes in the earth, to which strong cords are attached, and realise how the cataclysm had been produced.

"The fate of our poor companions was no longer a matter of uncertainty. We alone had escaped from the tempest of that overwhelming destruction. We were the only living white men upon the island."

Whereupon, they realise the utter hopelessness of their position.

"The whole country around us seemed to be swarming with savages, crowds of whom, we now perceived, had come over from the islands to the southward on flat rafts, doubtless with a view of lending their aid in the capture and plunder of the *Jane*. The vessel still lay calmly at anchor in the bay, those on board being apparently quite unconscious of any danger awaiting them. . ."

Nor can the onlookers warn their comrades on board, for

"In about half an hour we saw some sixty or seventy rafts, or flatboats, with outriggers, filled with savages, and coming round the southern bight of the harbour. . . Immediately afterward another detachment, still larger, approached in an opposite direction. . . The four canoes, too, were now quickly filled with natives. . . Thus, in less time than I have taken to tell it, the *Jane* saw herself surrounded by an immense multitude of desperadoes evidently bent upon capturing her at all hazards."

The savages' only arms are stones and clubs, but they vastly outnumber the men on board. The six men could never sustain such a contest and,

in their agitation, their first broadside from the starboard guns effects nothing.

"Not a canoe was hit or a single savage injured, the shots striking short and *ricocheting* over their heads."

Though the port guns are more effective and completely rout the attackers on that side, those in the canoes board the schooner

"to the number of more than a hundred and fifty. . . Our men were borne down at once, overwhelmed, trodden under foot, and absolutely torn to pieces in an instant.

"Seeing this, the savages on the rafts got the better of their fears, and came up in shoals to the plunder. In five minutes the Jane Guy was a pitiable scene indeed of havoc and tumultuous outrage. . ."

Whereupon 'Too-wit, with his black-skin warriors, hastens from the hills to partake of the spoils.

With the savages thus engaged, Pym and Peters are at liberty to reconnoitre their hillside. They find water and more of the filbert-like nuts and, also, succeed in killing a large black bird of the bittern species. Concealing their provisions, they reach their observation post in time to see the natives setting fire to the wrecked and dismantled Jane Guy, which they have first dragged ashore. "We now anticipated a catastrophe, and were not disappointed" for, the powder in the schooner's hold exploding, thousands of savages are mangled or killed.

"The whole surface of the bay was literally strewn with the struggling and drowning wretches, and on shore matters were even worse. They seemed utterly appalled. . . At length we observed a total change in their demeanour. From absolute stupor, they appeared to be, all at once, aroused to the highest pitch of excitement, and rushed wildly about, going to and from a certain point on the beach, with the strangest expressions of mingled horror, rage, and intense curiosity depicted on their countenances, and shouting, at the top of their voices, *Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*"

The savages now go off in search of stakes.

"These they brought to the station where the crowd was the thickest, which now separated so as to afford us a view of the object of all this excitement. We perceived something white lying upon the ground, but could not immediately make out what it was. At length we saw that it was the carcass of the strange animal with the scarlet teeth and claws which the schooner had picked up at sea. . . Captain Guy had had the body preserved. . . It had now been thrown on shore by the explosion; but why it had occasioned so much concern among the

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savages was more than we could comprehend. Although they crowded around the carcass at a little distance, none of them seemed willing to approach it closely. By-and-by the men with the stakes drove them in a circle around it, and, no sooner was this arrangement completed, than the whole of the vast assemblage rushed into the interior of the island, with loud screams of *Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*"

The white animal with the scarlet teeth and claws is thus revealed as *taboo* to the natives. It is *untouchable* and inspires both fear and awe. The taboo which is associated with every thing white on the island seems to derive, first and foremost, from the whiteness of this creature, which represents the taboo of taboos.

* * *

To appreciate the significance of this strange creature, we must now view the preceding events by the light of psycho-analysis.

We see that the savages, in toppling the wall of the gorge on the whites, repeated the very revolt against the father enacted by the mutineers on the *Grampus*. Once again, a weak father, Captain Guy, as incompetent as Captain Barnard, is removed and replaced by a stronger, wicked leader: in this case, Too-wit. As we said earlier, this succession of events doubtless re-echoes the substitution, in Poe's infancy, of his weak father David, by the strong and "wicked" father, John Allan. And since, in the mutiny, the prize of victory over the father is once more the mother, her ship-symbol, the *Jane Guy*, falls to the savages. Similarly, however, the victory of the second or wicked father is short for, just as the mate was killed by a sort of avenging taboo, operating through the apparition of Rogers' "ghost" (a father and mother figure both, as testified by his immensely swollen stomach), so Too-whit's followers and, no doubt, their chief—for he does not appear again—find death in capturing their dread prize, the mother-symbol *Jane Guy*, in the explosion.

From the wreck then emerges the carcass of the white creature with scarlet teeth and claws, no less terrifying to the blacks than the explosion. It is as though, to the savages, this creature were the divinity or spirit of the mother-ship and that the mysterious might of the mother-taboo now took revenge for the rape of the ship by producing its explosion.

In any case, the creature's maternal characteristics, as we find them in Poe, are fairly obvious: its *milky* whiteness suggestive of the mother's milk—a theme greatly elaborated in subsequent pages—and its scarlet teeth and claws: bloody warnings of the dangers that winning the mother involves. Reference has already been made to teeth and castration: teeth

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which, like those of Rowena and Berenice¹ and now, of this creature, are red with the blood of the deed of castration and doubtless, also, with that of the hæmoptyses of the tubercular mother as well as of her menstrual blood, seen or pried on by the child. The fact that its claws are scarlet points to yet another danger indicated, possibly, by its name, though I do not purpose to interpret the various names or cries of these natives of the black isle which flows with rivers of blood. To do that, we should need Poe's own associations, and these no one can supply. All we can say is that words like *Anamoo-moo*, *Lama-Lama* and other wild cries, remind us of infant babble and so correspond to the primary phase to which, at this point, our narrative has regressed. Nevertheless, the cry *Tekeli-li*, connected with the white creature, may tempt us to venture a suggestion. I myself know of a diary, kept in English by a little neurotic girl, where among other fabulous tales, there is a highly-imaginative account of a battle in which certain mother-animals carry mysterious weapons called "*Tikelies*". Grown-ups, we know, like to *tickle* and tease children, and at times make their nails felt. The resulting sense of danger associated with nails would, in this tale, be transferred to the scarlet claws of this mother-animal, and thus represent it as able to wound and castrate with its teeth and claws.

Clearly, there is here a further reminiscence of the growing child's aggressive impulse to bite and scratch the breast of the mother, which aggressive intent is then projected on to the mother and her consequent wish to retaliate, assumed. Secondly, by displacement from above to below, from the mouth to the vagina, this creature symbolises the *vagina dentata*.

* * *

Though the blacks meet due punishment as a result of the explosion, or rather of the taboo, for violating the ship-mother, Pym and Peters, innocent of that crime, remain safe hidden.

"During the six or seven days immediately following we remained in our hiding-place upon the hill, going out only occasionally, and then with the greatest precaution, for water and filberts."

When, however, the bird they have killed is eaten, nuts alone cannot preserve them.

"We had seen several large tortoises near the seashore to the eastward of the hill, and perceived they might be easily taken, if we could get at them without the observation of the natives. It was resolved, therefore, to make an attempt at descending."

¹ Cf. pages 218-9.

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Hunger thus compels the escapees to leave their shelter and they first try to descend the southern slope where, however, precipices bar their way. They then attempt the eastern slope, but here

“After an hour’s scramble, at the risk of breaking our necks, we discovered that we had merely descended into a vast pit of black granite, with fine dust at the bottom, and whence the only egress was by the rugged path in which we had come down.”

A final attempt is made to the north of the hill, but “we arrived at a chasm far deeper than any we had yet seen . . .”.

For several days after these fruitless exertions, the two friends explore every part of their mountain top in search of food. They discover nothing but filbert nuts and four square rods of “scurvy grass”.

“On the fifteenth of February . . . there was not a blade of this left, and the nuts were growing scarce; our situation, therefore, could hardly be more lamentable.”

And in a note to this passage we learn that

“this day was rendered remarkable by our observing in the south several huge wreaths of the grayish vapour I have before spoken of”.

Thus, on the very day they are most distressed by their wretchedness and hunger, the “grayish vapour” most clearly appears: a coincidence to which we shall return later. Again, on the sixteenth day, they vainly seek some avenue of escape round the walls of their prison, and once more descend into the chasm, but only to find and bring up a musket. On the seventeenth day they decide to examine the chasm of black granite into which they had first made their way and reach the bottom with no great difficulty.

“It was, indeed, one of the most singular looking places imaginable, and we could scarcely bring ourselves to believe it altogether the work of nature. The pit, from its eastern to its western extremity, was about five hundred yards in length when all its windings were threaded; the distance from east to west in a straight line not being more (I should suppose . . .) than forty or fifty yards.”

For some way down from the opening, the two sides of the crevasse

“bore little resemblance to each other . . . the one surface being of the soap-stone, and the other of marl, granulated with some metallic matter. . . ¹ Passing down, however, . . . the interval rapidly contracted,

¹ “The marl was also black;” says Poe in a note a few pages later, “indeed, we noticed no light-coloured substances of any kind upon the island”.

and the sides began to run parallel" . . . although still of different material.

"Upon arriving within fifty feet of the bottom, a perfect regularity commenced. The sides were now entirely uniform in substance, in color, and in lateral direction, the material being a very black and shining granite, and the distance between the two sides, at all points facing each other, exactly twenty yards. The precise formation of the chasm will be best understood by means of a delineation taken upon the spot. . ." (Fig. 1).

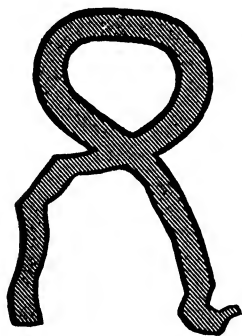


FIG. 1.

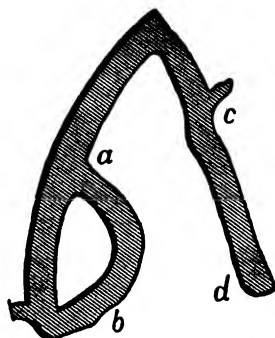


FIG. 2.

A narrow fissure opens at the lower extremity of this chasm and with some difficulty the explorers push a way through, guided by a faint light. They now find themselves in a winding second chasm, though of a different shape than the first. (Fig. 2.)

Here, too, a fissure leads into a third equally sinuous chasm (Fig. 3), at one end of which an opening extends fifteen feet into the rock



FIG. 3.



FIG. 5.

"where it terminated in a bed of marl. . . We were about leaving this fissure, into which very little light was admitted, when Peters called my attention to a range of singular-looking indentures in the surface

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of the marl forming the termination of the *cul-de-sac*. With a very slight exertion of the imagination, the left, or most northern of these indentations, might have been taken for the intentional, although rude, representation of a human figure standing erect, with outstretched arm. The rest of them bore also some little resemblance to alphabetical characters, and Peters was willing, at all events, to adopt the idle opinion that they were really such. I convinced him of his error, finally, . . .” and that they were merely “the work of nature”

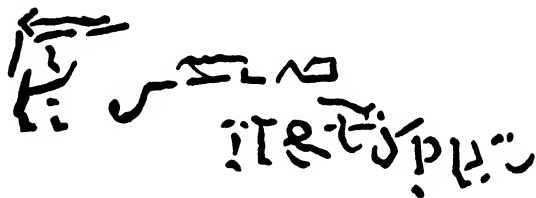


FIG. 4.

“After satisfying ourselves that these singular caverns offered us no means of escape from our prison, we made our way back, dejected and dispirited, to the summit of the hill.”

The next day the two men also discover “two triangular holes of great depth, and also with black granite sides” (Fig. 5), into which they do not think it worth while to venture.

Such are the results of the two “brothers’ ” explorations of the island’s black chasms. A note in the form of appendix later informs us that when conjoined, the shapes that form the outlines of the chasms constitute an Ethiopian verbal root meaning “To be shady”. If, however, we examine the drawings Poe himself gives, a different conclusion is forced upon us, for these sinuous windings of the dark chasms recall the convolutions of the intestines—those same “entrails” upon which Too-wit, the king of the isle, regaled himself at *Klock-Klock* with so much satisfaction. Thus, the “brothers’ ” exploration of the island’s dark bowels, whose rivers are veins of blood, would represent a phantasy of return to the mother, expressed in anal or intestinal terms.

Children who know nothing of the vagina or uterus, but are naturally aware of the digestive functions, readily imagine that birth takes place from the anus and that the child is grown, within the mother, by a digestive process. The story of Pym and Peters in the mother-island’s bowels is similarly conceived and their wanderings—however this may surprise the reader—recall on the one hand, the movement, in the bowels, of


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the fæces to which the child, in its anal sexual theories, likens itself and on the other, the child's prying and curiosity as regards the mother's body, at a time when it has no exact idea of what constitutes the differences between the sexes.

The mysterious characters in the black marl—the first of the cryptograms that were to become such a passion with Poe—witness to these investigations. The enigma to be deciphered is that of the mother's body and, as we shall see in *The Gold Bug*, it was from this instinctual root that his later passion to decipher cryptograms grew.

In any case, after Pym and Peters have wandered through these tortuous chasms they reach an *impasse*, much as though no outlet existed to the *cloaca* (for one cannot justly—at this stage—distinguish vagina from rectum). Even this point, however, seems to be guarded by watchmen in the shape of the mysterious characters Poe describes as *indentures*, reminiscent of *dentures* or *teeth*. May we not see here, too, another allusion to the fantasy of the *vagina dentata* so frequent in Poe's work? In that case, the mysterious letters would represent a veto on the infant's exit from the mother's body, identical with that which was to make it impossible for Poe, the man, ever to enter a woman's body.

But though Pym and Peters find all issue barred by the bed of marl, and cannot be *born* through that aperture, some hint of a means to that end is nevertheless provided by the very hieroglyphs that bar their path. Though they may not succeed in deciphering them, destiny will guide them to behave as though they had. For, says Poe, in the note he appends to this tale:

"In regard to the 'left or most northwardly' of the indentures . . . it is more than probable that the opinion of Peters was correct, and that the hieroglyphical appearance was really the work of art, and intended as the representation of a human form. The delineation is before the reader, and he may, or may not, perceive the resemblance suggested; but the rest of the indentures afford strong confirmation of Peters's idea. The upper range is evidently the Arabic verbal root  'To be white', whence all the inflections of brilliancy and whiteness. The lower range is not so immediately perspicuous. The characters are somewhat broken and disjointed; nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that, in their perfect state, they formed the full Egyptian word **ΠΑΥΥΡΗC**. 'The region of the south'. It should be observed that these opinions confirm the opinion of Peters in regard to the 'most northwardly' of the figures. The arm is outstretched towards the south."

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This "hero" Peters it is—Peters, who discovered the hieroglyphs and, in spite of Pym, believes them to have meaning—who now presides at the delivery or *birth* of the two brothers from the island's bowels in the hill: he it is, who—like the indented figure which points south—will free them both after sundry deeds of violence and lead Poe-Pym, in triumph, to the supreme goal of his most primitive desires.

* * *

"On the twentieth of the month, finding it altogether impossible to subsist any longer upon the filberts, the use of which occasioned us the most excruciating torment, we resolved to make a desperate attempt at descending the southern declivity of the hill. The face of the precipice was here of the softest species of soapstone, although nearly perpendicular throughout its whole extent (a depth of a hundred and fifty feet at the least), and in many places even overarching. After long search we discovered a narrow ledge about twenty feet below the brink of the gulf; upon this Peters contrived to leap . . ."

He then descends the sheer cliff by a rope of knotted handkerchiefs, which are tied to pegs that he manages to drive in the soft stone while cutting steps with his pocket-knife.

"By these means," says Pym, "(means which I should never have conceived of myself, and for which we were indebted altogether to Peters's ingenuity and resolution) my companion finally succeeded, with the occasional aid of projections in the cliff, in reaching the bottom without accident."

Thus Peters, the "hero", guides his younger brother's steps.

"It was some time before I could summon sufficient resolution to follow him; but I did at length attempt it. Peters had taken off his shirt before descending, and this, with my own, formed the rope necessary for the adventure. . . I fastened this rope to the bushes, and let myself down rapidly, striving, by the vigour of my movements, to banish the trepidation which I could overcome in no other manner. This answered sufficiently well for the first four or five steps; but presently I found my imagination growing terribly excited by thoughts of the vast depth yet to be descended. . . At length arrived that crisis of fancy, so fearful in all similar cases. . . There was a ringing in my ears, and I said, 'This is my knell of death!' And now I was consumed with the irrepressible desire of looking below . . . my whole soul was pervaded with a *longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable."

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He thereupon swoons and is about to fall, when Peters, who has climbed to his rescue by the rock-steps and pegs, manages to seize him in time. Eventually, with some aid, Pym safely reaches the bottom.

Thus the hill is delivered of the two "brothers", one of whom, the elder and heroic is, as it were, the midwife of the younger, weaker brother.

The region to which they now come is desolate, black, barren and strewn with huge tumuli while, to the northward, they perceive the ruins of the disrupted cliff which proved the tomb of their friends and their "father", Captain Guy. Food being their immediate object, they resolve to make for the sea-coast about half a mile away,

"with a view of catching turtle. . . We had proceeded some hundred yards. . . when . . . five savages sprung upon us from a small cavern, felling Peters to the ground with a blow from a club."

Pym thereupon advances on the assailants, firing his pistols in quick succession.

"Two savages fell, and one, who was in the act of thrusting a spear into Peters, sprung to his feet without accomplishing his purpose. My companion being thus released, we had no further difficulty. He had his pistols also, but prudently declined using them, confiding in his great personal strength, which far exceeded that of any person I have ever known. Seizing a club from one of the savages who had fallen, he dashed out the brains of the three who remained, killing each instantaneously with a single blow of the weapon, and leaving us completely masters of the field."

Thus Peters, hero-fashion, wielding his club with all-powerful arm, like another Hercules rids the earth of its monsters, and sends Too-wit's subjects to join the mate and his crew in the beyond.

Now wild howls are heard in the distance and it is clear that the natives, alarmed by the sound of firing, are rushing to attack. One of the savages Pym shot now returns to his senses, much like Parker on the *Grampus* (clearly Pym is no killer!) and, like him, is spared on condition he remains submissive and helps. All three then run for the beach.

"So far, the irregularities of the ground we had been traversing hid the sea, except at intervals, from our sight, and, when we first had it fairly in view, it was, perhaps, two hundred yards distant. As we emerged into the open beach we saw, to our great dismay, an immense crowd of natives pouring from the village, and from all visible quarters of the island . . ." with wild gesticulations and howls. Fortunately, Pym discovers "the bows of two canoes projecting from

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behind a large rock which ran out into the water. Towards these we now ran with all speed, and, reaching them, found them unguarded, and without any other freight than three of the large Gallipago turtles and the usual supply of paddles for sixty rowers. We instantly took possession of one of them, and, forcing our captive on board, pushed out to sea with all the strength we could command."

The two men then realise that they have been foolish enough to leave the savages the other canoe. They return and Peters smashes a large part of the bow, and one of its sides, with his musket. At the same time, Peters despatches two or three more savages who seek to prevent him, after which the three haste out to sea. The black island is left to its inhabitants, of whom Pym thus takes leave: "... they appeared to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men" on the earth: epithets, doubtless, applicable in Poe's mind to John Allan, from whom, in his grandfather's shape, Pym fled in going to sea in the *Grampus*.

The savages, in flat-bottomed canoes or rafts, eventually give up pursuing the swifter craft. The two adventurers are soon well out to sea, their dazzled eyes now turned to the wondrous visions the South Pole will unfold.

* * *

"We now found ourselves in the wide and desolate Antarctic Ocean, in a latitude exceeding eighty-four degrees, in a frail canoe, and with no provision but the three turtles. The long Polar winter, too, could not be considered as far distant."

They see islands, but decide not to risk landing. To attempt to turn northward again would mean great cold and exposure, for, paradoxically,

"In coming from the northward in the *Jane Guy* we had been gradually leaving behind us the severest regions of ice. . . Only one course seemed to be left open for hope. We resolved to steer boldly to the southward. . ."

They now, with their prisoner's help, seek to render their canoe more seaworthy. Two superfluous paddles are set up for masts

"... opposite each other, one by each gunwale. . . To these masts we attached a sail made of our shirts—doing this with some difficulty, as here we could get no assistance from our prisoner whatever. . . The sight of the linen seemed to affect him in a very singular manner. He could not be prevailed upon to touch it or go near it, shuddering when we attempted to force him and shrieking out *Tekeli-li!*"

The linen being white is, of course, *taboo* to the native.

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The canoe now heads full south, helped by a gentle, steady wind. The sea is smooth and daylight continuous.

"No ice whatever was to be seen; *nor did I ever see one particle of this after leaving the parallel of Bennett's Islet.*" Seven or eight days later, they have "proceeded a vast distance to the southward, as the wind blew constantly with" them, "and a very strong current set continually in the direction" they "were pursuing".

Now vast phantasmagoria herald the approach to the South Pole. And whereas in his first *rebirth*-phantasy, Pym emerges from the Grampus's hold only to suffer the torments of hunger and thirst on the hulk—doubtless a latent memory of his privations when with his dying, penniless mother—now, in this second *rebirth* from the bowels of the black mother-isle, Pym emerges into a grandiose fulfilment of the oral phantasies of the child. All children are fascinated by fairy-tales of children who find toffee or ginger-bread houses, with chocolate or barley sugar furniture inside and it is to imaginings such as these, that Poe here gives geographical extension. For if the black island represents a *cloacal* phantasy, it will soon be apparent what symbolic significance we must attach to the whiteness of the South Pole.

"March 1. Many unusual phenomena now indicated that we were entering upon a region of novelty and wonder. A high range of light gray vapour"—that same grayish vapour observed by Pym and Peters from the summit of their crevasse when food began to fail them—"appeared constantly in the southern horizon, flaring up occasionally in lofty streaks, now darting from east to west, now from west to east, and again presenting a level and uniform summit—in short, having all the wild variations of the Aurora Borealis. . . The temperature of the sea seemed to be increasing momentarily, and there was a very perceptible alteration in its color."

The next day the prisoner gives his captors some details of his native island. Only now do we learn that its name is *Tsalal*, that it is one of a group of seven or eight islands ruled by a king called *Tsalemon* or *Psalemon*, who resides in one of the smallest. Also, that the huge black animal, whose skins the warriors wear, is only found near the king's huts. His own name, he tells them, is *Nu-Nu*.

But, as we have said, we shall not attempt to analyse these names which sound like infant babble, for to do so we should need Poe's own associations and, those, we cannot have.

"March 3. The heat of the water was now truly remarkable, and

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its color was undergoing a rapid change, being no longer transparent, but of a milky consistency and hue."

Thus, we see the *sea-water*, as a result of the unconscious symbolism it expresses, converted into the *mother's* milk and, in fact, the very ocean is now milk.

"In our immediate vicinity it was usually smooth . . . but we were frequently surprised at perceiving, to our right and left, at different distances, sudden and extensive agitations of the surface—these, we at length noticed, were always preceded by wild flickerings in the region of vapour to the southward."

Mysterious bonds, it seems, connect the sea with the Pole.

"March 4. To-day, with the view of widening our sail, the breeze from the northward dying away perceptibly, I took from my coat-pocket a white handkerchief. Nu-Nu was seated at my elbow, and the linen accidentally flaring in his face, he became violently affected with convulsions. These were succeeded by drowsiness and stupor, and low murmuring of *Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*"

Nu-Nu here seems to succumb to an attack of hysteria, determined by his terror of white. As analysts, we cannot but think—since hysterical convulsions represent anxiety-inhibited genital pleasure—that this *white* has reactivated memory-traces of infantile masturbation in Nu-Nu's unconscious: masturbation which often occurs in suckling babes in the form of pleasurable but vague feelings akin to those produced by tickling ("*Tekeli-li*"). This would then occasion a terror of white, of milk-colour, among the natives of *Tsalal*, whose incest-wishes and sexuality appear to have been as precociously repressed as were their creator's while, at the same time, retaining the same anxiety-determined mother-fixation in their unconscious.

But, Peters the hero and Pym, his page—in the greatest wish-phantasy of all—imagine themselves to have mastered these terrors.

"March 5. The wind had entirely ceased, but it was evident that we were still hurrying on to the southward, under the influence of a powerful current. And now, indeed, it would seem reasonable that we should experience some alarm at the turn events were taking—but we felt none. The countenance of Peters indicated nothing of this nature, although it wore at times an expression I could not fathom. The Polar winter appeared to be coming on—but coming without its terrors. I felt a *numbness* of body and mind, a dreaminess of sensation—but this was all."

What is this “numbness”, this “dreaminess of sensation”, but the beatific abandon and surrender of the replete babe falling asleep on its mother’s breast. This is the state of *innocence* which Poe, regressing thus to the first oral erotic phase, might dream of reaching in his flight from the dangers of adult genital activity.

“March 6. The gray vapour had now arisen many more degrees above the horizon, and was gradually losing its grayness of tint. The heat of the water was extreme, even unpleasant to the touch, and its milky hue was more evident than ever.”

The meaning of this passage is clear: it is the memory of warm milk drunk from the mother’s breast. And if the black island symbolises the mother’s *cloaca*, the white Polar regions symbolise the mother’s breasts and milk.

“To-day a violent agitation of the water occurred very close to the canoe. It was attended, as usual, with a wild flaring up of the vapour at its summit, and a momentary division at its base,”

—a division, in fact, like the fissure which spread until the House of Usher collapsed.

“A fine white powder, resembling ashes—but certainly not such—fell over the canoe and over a large surface of the water, as the flickering died away among the vapour and the commotion subsided in the sea.”

Thus the great maternal deity, that presides over these regions, manifests her power—as Jehovah rained manna in the desert—by pouring milk on her sons in the shape of snowflakes. A transference must often occur in childhood from the whiteness of milk to the more striking whiteness of snow, whence doubtless the child’s fascinated interest in snowflakes and falling snow. As we shall see, this austral milk shares yet another property of snow; it melts in contact with water.

“Nu-Nu now threw himself on his face in the bottom of the boat, and no persuasions could induce him to arise.”

“March 7. This day we questioned Nu-Nu concerning the motives of his countrymen in destroying our companions; but he appeared to be too utterly overcome by terror to afford us any rational reply. He still lay obstinately in the bottom of the boat; and . . . made use only of idiotic gesticulations, such as raising with his forefinger the upper lip, and displaying the teeth which lay beneath it. These were black. We had never before seen the teeth of an inhabitant of Tsalal.”

Actually, however, Nu-Nu’s “gesticulations” are sufficiently rational, for they perfectly express what he wishes to say: namely, that the blacks

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massacred the whites because their white teeth violated the island taboo on white, the strangers' apparently milk-stained teeth implying incestuous relations with the mother. Now Nu-Nu, under this rain of milk from heaven, is overcome with terror and lies silent and motionless in the bottom of the boat.

"March 8. To-day there floated by us one of the white animals whose appearance on the beach at Tsalal had occasioned so wild a commotion among the savages. I would have picked it up, but there came over me a sudden listlessness, and I forebore. The heat of the water still increased, and the hand could no longer be endured within it. Peters spoke little, and I knew not what to think of his apathy. Nu-Nu breathed, and no more."

Thus the two "brothers" sink ever deeper into the lethargy which characterises the replete nursing as, nearing the mother, they find the warmth of her milk, and the heat from her body, ever increasing. But whereas the *cloacal* island, modelled on concepts derived from the anal-erotic phase, represents the realm of solids, this *mammary* Pole represents the realm of fluids, by way of the milk so all-important to the child in its primary oral-erotic phase.

"March 9. The whole ashy material fell now continually around us, and in vast quantities. The range of vapour to the southward had arisen prodigiously in the horizon, and began to assume more distinctness of form. I can liken it to nothing but a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense and far-distant rampart in the heaven. The gigantic curtain ranged along the whole extent of the southern horizon. It emitted no sound."

Twelve days pass unmentioned, after which Pym writes:

"March 21. A sullen darkness now hovered above us—but from out the milky depths of the ocean a luminous glare arose, and stole up along the bulwarks of the boat."

Here one remembers those phosphorescent exhalations of decay which hung over the tarn in *The Fall of the House of Usher*; it is as though this phosphorescence represents an unconscious memory that the mother, from whom all nurture flows, will soon die and be a corpse.

"We were nearly overwhelmed by the white ashy shower which settled upon us and upon the canoe, but melted into the water as it fell. The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and the distance. Yet we were evidently approaching it with a hideous velocity. At

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intervals there were visible in it wide, yawning, but momentary rents, and from out these rents, within which was a chaos of flitting and indistinct images, there came rushing and mighty, but soundless winds, tearing up the enkindled ocean in their course."

Here there comes to mind those currents of air which fluttered the hangings of Rowena's death chamber and presaged the return of Ligeia, the *mother*, by way of Rowena's corpse. The rents, also, which tear the curtain of vapour, will soon be revealed, like the yawning crack in the House of Usher, to be in essence, a female symbol.

"March 22. The darkness had materially increased, relieved only by the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us."

As darkness falls, the return to the womb phantasy reappears, but now, about to be gratified; gorged with milk, as it were.

"Many gigantic and pallidly white birds flew continuously now from behind the veil, and their scream was the eternal *Tekeli-li!* as they retreated from our vision. Hereupon Nu-Nu stirred in the bottom of the boat; but upon touching him, we found his spirit departed."

Thus, the mother taboo strikes him down at the moment he approaches her too closely and, in the moment her thrilling "ticklings" and voluptuous caresses are evoked by the big white mother-birds. Here Nu-Nu, like Parker and Augustus before him, seems the expiatory victim by which the other brothers become immune.

"And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us."

Thus the mother, in this consummate wish-fulfilment phantasy, reopens her milk-white body to her two sons. And it is Peters the mighty, the hero, who thus re-enters with his brother Pym, as though to lend him potency to do so.

"But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportion than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow."

Here, as in *Ligeia*, the key to the story is given in the last lines. For now we behold the form to which all Pym's wanderings and adventures led; the great maternal divinity whose sex, though unmentioned, must be that of the "shrouded" figure, the "woman in white", who appeared to the raving Poe in Moyamensing Prison; it is the mother reclaiming her

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son. Again, the "whiteness of the snow" which shines about this new Diana of the Ephesians, (the whiteness and abundance of milk substituted for her multiple breasts), appears doubly and contradictorily determined. On one hand, she is white as the South Pole and warm with milk and with life, so recalling that blessed time when he was suckled at his mother's breast but, on the other, now related not to milk but to snow, representing *coldness* and death and so recalling unconscious memories of his pale, dead mother. Given the indifference to time characteristic of the unconscious, we see condensed in this figure the two main attributes Poe successively attached to his mother: *milk* and *death*.

But why does Poe choose the South Pole to symbolise his mother? Reynolds's expedition, much discussed at this time, was doubtless but the minor reason; the deepest lay elsewhere. But this was buried deep in his past, in very early childhood, doubtless when his sick, dying mother took him southwards, down the coast, on her tours.

Thus from Boston, where he was born, they went to Richmond, where his mother was to die after their stay in New York, in which place his father disappeared. From Richmond they journeyed to Virginia and South Carolina where, for a time, he had her all to himself. So Arthur Gordon Pym, after sailing from Nantucket in the north and losing two weak fathers *en route*—Barnard and Guy—at last reaches the South Pole where he is welcomed by a white form swathed in veils of milk that are, also, a shroud.

According to Poe, Pym's narrative remained "unfinished". In the appendix note already referred to, we are told that the hero, the doughty Peters, still lives, but that Pym himself perished by an "accident", of which we are told nothing.

This accident could not have occurred during the journey related in the "Narrative", for the following passage implies his safe return:

"The loss of two or three final chapters . . . is the more deeply to be regretted, as, it cannot be doubted, they contained matter relative to the Pole itself, or at least to regions in its very near proximity . . ."

In fact, however, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is truly ended. What could Poe have added to this ultimate vision of the mother? What further mysteries about her could he have revealed? The tale properly ends on the question mark of mysteries unplumbed and the dazzling vision of the mother veiled in symbolic white.

The remainder of the appendix is devoted to deciphering the hieroglyphs in the chasms on Tsalal, with the conclusion we know—that they

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refer to the direction and whiteness of the Pole. Enigmatically, Poe ends it thus: "*I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock.*"

To whose vengeance does Poe thus refer? Jehovah's? Or—as we should say—the father's? For he in fact it was, who, in prehistoric times established his taboos on the isle of *Tsalal*. His prohibitions, it is, which hold the black wicked sons from approaching the *whiteness* of the mother. His bans, in Poe's own case, forbade a normal approach to women.

Thus the epilogue to this story ends with a concrete, though sybilline reference to the father, from whom every primitive taboo, and our own morals, derive.

In these pages I have sought to render both registers of the tale of Arthur Gordon Pym. The adventures speak for themselves and are, we might say, likening works of art to dreams, the manifest content of the tale. That is the upper register. The lower register, however, which mingles with it, wherein lies all the depth of the tale and that which carries conviction—its inexplicable but sure conviction—resembles the latent content of the dream which psycho-analysis, alone, can reveal. It is this part of the tale which we have sought to draw to the light.

* * *

Having devoted so much space to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, we shall not linger over Poe's two other sea-stories. It will suffice to recall that both in *A Descent into the Maelström* and *MS. Found in a Bottle*, the hero is drawn into a vast whirlpool—which, for all its terror, fatally attracts him—to realise that these tales, each in its way, expresses a version of the return-to-the-womb phantasy. The hero of *MS. Found in a Bottle* perishes in a gigantic whirlpool which Poe already connects with the South Pole and with him, the ship manned by the living dead, upon whose decks he falls. In *A Descent into the Maelström*, the hero escapes the fate to which his brother falls victim, in the same way that Poe survived his brother Henry. But in both stories, the heroes succeed, as it were, in touching bottom, in reaching those innermost uterine depths where the foetus once lay, bathed in those amniotic waters which are one of the few vestiges of that parent ocean from which, phylogenetically, we have all sprung.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A Tale of the Earth

The Gold-Bug¹

IN the autumn of 1827, when Poe was eighteen, his unit, Battery "H", of the 1st Artillery Regiment, was ordered from Fort Independence in Boston Harbour to Charleston, South Carolina. Like Pym, Poe left Nantucket to its northern mists and sailed south, then landed on the low shores of Sullivan's Island, opposite Charleston, where Fort Moultrie became his home for a year. Garrison duty was hardly onerous and the young soldier had plenty of time to day-dream and explore the shores and groves of that balmy island. It was here that, on guard under the stars, he composed the astral verses of *Al Aaraaf*. After fifteen years, he was to place his story, *The Gold-Bug*, in the same setting.

When Poe, in Philadelphia, wrote *The Gold Bug* in 1842, he was shortly to lose his editorship of *Graham's Magazine*. Poverty already knocked at the door and Virginia's health—her first recorded hæmoptysis occurred that January—was more precarious than ever. Poe was drinking heavily and, as a defence against his growing fears of madness, had begun to set himself up as the "infallible ratiocinator". Like his own Dupin, he busied himself solving ciphers and defied the world to produce a code he could not break down. He who could not now earn money enough to preserve his family from want, might at least seek refuge in the phantasies of wealth, the glitter of gold and jewels, of *The Gold Bug*.

Such seem to have been the factors in Poe's adolescence and maturity which served to inspire this tale. Remoter, infantile factors will be dealt with in due course.

¹ *The Gold-Bug*: Prize story of *The Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper*, June 21-28, 1843; 1845.

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The setting of *The Gold Bug*, as we have said, is Sullivan's Island and the Carolina coast. The hero, William Legrand, stems from an old Huguenot family which was once wealthy: in this, like Edgar when with the Allans. Unspecified misfortunes, however, have reduced him to want. He has left New Orleans, the city of his forefathers, as Poe left Richmond, "to avoid the mortification consequent upon his disasters" and to settle on Sullivan's Island.

Follows a description of the island:

"This Island is a very singular one. It consists of little else than the sea sand, and is about three miles long. Its breadth at no point exceeds a quarter of a mile. It is separated from the main land by a scarcely perceptible creek, oozing its way through a wilderness of reeds and slime, a favorite resort of the marsh-hen. The vegetation, as might be supposed, is scant, or at least dwarfish. No trees of any magnitude are to be seen. Near the western extremity, where Fort Moultrie stands, and where are some miserable frame buildings, tenanted, during summer, by the fugitives from Charleston dust and fever, may be found, indeed, the bristly palmetto; but the whole island, with the exception of this western point, and a line of hard, white beach on the seacoast, is covered with a dense undergrowth of the sweet myrtle, so much prized by the horticulturists of England. The shrub here often attains the height of fifteen or twenty feet, and forms an almost impenetrable coppice, burthening the air with its fragrance.

"In the inmost recesses of this coppice, not far from the eastern or more remote end of the island, Legrand had built himself a small hut, which he occupied when I first, by mere accident, made his acquaintance. This soon ripened into friendship. . . I found him well educated, with unusual powers of mind, but infected with misanthropy, and subject to perverse moods of alternate enthusiasm and melancholy."

Like Poe, Legrand is a man of superior gifts, though by temperament cyclothymic.

"His chief amusements were gunning and fishing, or sauntering along the beach and through the myrtles, in quest of shells or entomological specimens. . ."¹

So, too, the young Fort Moultrie artilleryman must have searched for the great gold scarabs to be found on these sub-tropical beaches. Like Edgar, too, who in his Virginia childhood would go out with "Dab" or some other old family slave, Legrand "was usually accompanied by an

¹ Cf. *Israfel*, p. 214 ff.: *Poe's Gold Bug Synthesis*.

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old negro, called Jupiter. . .” whose dialect, as given by Poe, is far more Virginia than South Carolina.² Jupiter had been manumitted before the family reverses, but neither threats nor promises could induce him

“to abandon what he considered his right of attendance upon the footsteps of his young ‘Massa Will’. It is not improbable that the relatives of Legrand, conceiving him to be somewhat unsettled in intellect, had contrived to instil this obstinacy into Jupiter, with a view to the supervision and guardianship of the wanderer.”

Yet this Legrand, deemed so unsettled in intellect, will surprise and dazzle us—and win wealth—by his remarkable reasoning faculties and analytical brilliance. Poe, writer and poet of genius that he was, successful magazine editor and solver of cryptograms, would have thought that he, too, “must” win “success” and wealth by his gifts, despite his perpetual penury and John Allan’s verdict that he would never be a success. Only the opportunity, he must have thought, had always evaded him; the opportunity that came to Legrand in chancing on *The Gold-Bug*.

Thus Legrand is another metamorphosis of Poe, with Poe’s own hopes and pride. But unlike his *Usher*, a Poe enamoured of death, he here becomes, like his elder brothers, Dupin the detective, for instance (of whom more anon) and Pym the explorer, a Poe forever preoccupied with enigmas to which he must and does, find the key. We have seen what mystery was solved by Pym and shall see what enigmas were solved by Dupin. Here, it is the problem that faces Legrand.

“The winters in the latitude of Sullivan’s Island are seldom very severe,” continues the narrator, “and in the fall of the year it is a rare event indeed when a fire is considered necessary. About the middle of October, 18—, there occurred, however, a day of remarkable chilliness.”

On this day the narrator chooses to visit the island and towards evening knocks at Legrand’s door. Getting no reply, he goes in.

“A fine fire was blazing upon the hearth. . . I threw off an overcoat, took an arm-chair by the crackling logs, and awaited patiently the arrival of my hosts.”

They return “soon after dark” and Jupiter sets about preparing supper.

“Legrand was in one of his fits—how else shall I term them?—of enthusiasm. . . he had hunted down and secured, with Jupiter’s assistance, a *scarabæus* which he believed to be totally new. . .”

² *Israfel*, p. 214.

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This, however, he has left for the night with Lieutenant G— from the fort, and is unable to display his treasure, which he describes as being

“of a brilliant gold color—about the size of a large hickory-nut—with two jet black spots near one extremity of the back, and another, somewhat longer, at the other. The *antennæ* are—”

“ ‘Dey ain’t *no* tin in him, Massa Will, . . .’ here interrupts Jupiter; ‘de bug is a goole bug, solid, ebery bit of him, inside and all, sep him wing—nebber feel half so hebby a bug in my life’.”

Since he cannot show it until next morning, Legrand wishes to sketch it for his friend but, finding no paper in the drawer, uses a scrap of what appears to be dirty foolscap taken from his waistcoat pocket. The sketch finished, Legrand hands it to his friend, still by the fire. Thereupon Legrand’s Newfoundland dog jumps playfully on the visitor’s shoulders. While he is gambolling with the visitor, the examination of the sketch is deferred.

When eventually he does look at it, he is surprised to find only a death’s head on the paper. A spirited discussion then takes place, for Legrand prides himself on his drawing and maintains that, not only has he depicted the scarab, but has drawn its *antennæ* with special care. The friend is positive that no *antennæ* are visible. Legrand then receives back the paper “very peevisly”, and is about to crumple it up and throw it in the fire, when

“a casual glance at the design seemed suddenly to rivet his attention.

Presently he took from his coat pocket a wallet, placed the paper carefully in it, and deposited both in a writing-desk, which he locked.”

His emotion subsides and he becomes more and more absorbed in revery, which his friend interprets as a sign to depart.

About a month later, Jupiter visits the narrator at Charleston. The old negro is dispirited and much concerned for his master’s health, who will persist that there is nothing wrong:

“ ‘but den,’ says Jupiter, ‘what make him go about looking dis here way, wid he head down and he soldiers up, and as white as a gose? And den he keep a syphon all de time . . . wid de figgurs on de slate.’ ”

Jupiter then adds that a few days earlier Legrand had given him the slip and gone off alone all day. He had meant to give him a good beating when he returned, but had not the heart, he looked so poorly. The cause of the change, he is convinced, is that “Massa Will” has been bitten in the head by the “goole-bug”. “ ‘What make him dream bout de goole so much, if taint cause he bit by de goole-bug?’ ” Legrand, it transpires, has been

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talking of gold in his sleep. At this point Jupiter produces a letter to the narrator from Legrand:

“ ‘Do come. I wish to see you *to-night*, upon business of importance. I assure you that it is of the *highest* importance.’ ”

At the wharf, the narrator is surprised to find a scythe and three spades in the bottom of the boat. It is about three in the afternoon when they arrive and Legrand greets them eagerly. “His countenance was pale even to ghastliness, and his deep-set eyes glared with unnatural lustre.” The friend enquires after his health, and whether Lieutenant G— has returned the scarab?

“ ‘Oh, yes! . . . Do you know that Jupiter is quite right about it? . . . In supposing it to be a bug of *real gold*. . . This bug is to make my fortune . . . to reinstate me in my family possessions. . . Since Fortune has thought fit to bestow it upon me, I have only to use it properly and I shall arrive at the gold of which it is the index.’ ”

Jupiter having refused to bring the scarab for inspection, Legrand fetches it himself and grandiloquently continues, “ ‘I sent for you, that I might have your counsel and assistance in furthering the views of Fate and of the bug—’ ”. But here the narrator interrupts, tells him he is feverish and advises him to go to bed. Legrand, however, insists he is well, though under an excitement which the narrator can relieve by accompanying himself and Jupiter into the hills on the mainland.

“ ‘. . . we shall need the aid of some person in whom we can confide. You are the only one we can trust. Whether we succeed or fail, the excitement which you now perceive in me will be equally allayed.’ ”

When Legrand declares that the expedition is connected with the scarab, his friend at first demurs, but later consents provided they return by sunrise.

“ ‘With a heavy heart I accompanied my friend. We started about four o’clock—Legrand, Jupiter, the dog, and myself. Jupiter had with him the scythe and spades. . . For my own part, I had charge of a couple of dark lanterns, while Legrand contented himself with the *scarabæus*, which he carried attached to the end of a bit of whip-cord; twirling it to and fro, with the air of a conjuror, as he went.’ ”

The party then crosses the creek at the head of the island and ascends the high grounds on the mainland shore, “through a tract of country excessively wild and desolate”, which suggests the Ragged Mountains of Virginia, rather than the low-lying Carolina coast.

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"... the sun was just setting when we entered a region infinitely more dreary than any yet seen. It was a species of tableland, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags. . . Deep ravines, in various directions, gave an air of still sterner solemnity to the scene."

Jupiter, at his master's order, now scythes a path through the brambles to a gigantic tulip tree, which Legrand asks him to climb. Jupiter is soon in the branches and dangling the scarab, at Legrand's behest, from the end of its string.

From below Legrand shouts directions to the negro. At the "seventh branch", he orders him to venture along it as far as he can. Here, Jupiter reports that the branch is "dead limb putty much all de way". Testing the branch, he finds, however, that he can continue and crawls out almost to the end. Now, he finds a human skull nailed to the branch and explains: " ' . . . somebody bin lef him head up de tree, and de crows done gobble ebervy bit ob de meat off . . . ' "

Legrand, greatly excited, orders Jupiter to drop the scarab from its string through the skull's *left* eye, whereupon the insect appears, glistening

"like a globe of burnished gold, in the last rays of the setting sun. . .

Legrand immediately took the scythe, and cleared with it a circular space, three or four yards in diameter, just beneath the insect, and, having accomplished this, ordered Jupiter to let go the string and come down from the tree."

He then drives a peg into the ground "at the precise spot where the beetle fell", takes from his pocket a tape measure and, having fastened one end to the trunk of the tree nearest the peg, unrolls it for fifty feet

"in the direction already established by the two points of the tree and the peg. . . At the spot thus attained a second peg was driven, and about this, as a centre, a rude circle, about four feet in diameter, described. Taking now a spade himself, and giving one to Jupiter and one to me, Legrand begged us to set about digging as quickly as possible. . .

"We dug very steadily for two hours. . . When the time mentioned had expired, we had reached a depth of five feet, and yet no signs of any treasure became manifest. . . "

Whereupon the narrator concludes that Legrand is mad and in search of imaginary treasure.

"The gold-seeker, whom I sincerely pitied, at length clambered from the pit, with the bitterest disappointment imprinted upon every feature." . . .

Gathering their tools, the party starts towards home.

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"We had taken, perhaps, a dozen steps in this direction, when, with a loud oath, Legrand strode up to Jupiter, and seized him by the collar."

The negro falls to his knees.

"'You scoundrel!' cries Legrand, 'you infernal black villain! . . . which—which is your left eye?'"

Jupiter here claps his hand to his *right* eye and holds

"it there with a desperate pertinacity, as if in immediate dread of his master's attempt at a gouge".

Since it is evident that the ignorant negro, in error, has dropped the scarab through the skull's right eye, Legrand leads the way back and, being satisfied by Jupiter that the skull faces out and not toward the limb, shifts his original peg to a position some three inches west of where the beetle first fell. Having once more taken his distances, the second peg is driven "several yards from the point" where they had dug.

The three men again set to work and

"... when we had been at work perhaps an hour and a half, we were . . . interrupted by the violent howlings of the dog. . . Upon Jupiter's again attempting to muzzle him"

—as during the first operations, to stop him barking—

"he made furious resistance, and, leaping into the hole, tore up the mould frantically with his claws. In a few seconds he had uncovered a mass of human bones, forming two complete skeletons, intermingled with several buttons of metal, and what appeared to be the dust of decayed woollen. One or two strokes of a spade upturned the blade of a large Spanish knife, and, as we dug farther, three or four loose pieces of gold and silver coin came to light."

Soon after, says the narrator:

"I stumbled and fell forward, having caught the toe of my boot in a large ring of iron that lay half buried in the loose earth".

Ten minutes later, the searchers have unearthed

"an oblong chest of wood, which, from its perfect preservation, . . . had plainly been subjected to some mineralizing process. . . This box was three feet and a half long, three feet broad, and two and a half feet deep. It was firmly secured by bands of wrought iron. . . On each side of the chest, near the top, were three rings of iron—six in all—by . . . which a firm hold could be obtained by six persons. Our utmost united efforts served only to disturb the coffer very slightly in its bed. We at once saw the impossibility of removing so great a weight. Luckily, the sole fastenings of the lid consisted of two sliding bolts. These we

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drew back—trembling and panting with anxiety. In an instant, a treasure of incalculable value lay gleaming before us. As the rays of the lanterns fell within the pit, there flashed upwards, from a confused heap of gold and of jewels, a glow and a glare that absolutely dazzled our eyes.”

Jupiter, utterly overcome, falls on his knees in the pit and, burying his arms to the elbow in a veritable bath of gold, excuses himself in having abused the insect for deranging his master’s reason when, in fact, it had helped them to this priceless discovery.

Having lightened the chest by removing two-thirds of its contents, they eventually manage to lift it from its hole. The articles removed are left in custody of the dog, and the chest, with considerable effort, carried to Legrand’s hut. After some rest, they return with sacks for the rest of the booty, then go home exhausted and sink into broken slumber. Three or four hours later they rise to examine their treasure, consisting of jewels, gold coins, jewelled gold watches and a vast quantity of solid gold ornaments.

“When, at length, we had concluded our examination. . . . Legrand, who saw that I was dying with impatience for a solution of this most extraordinary riddle, entered into a full detail of all the circumstances connected with it.”

We need not repeat these here and will content ourselves with outlining the complex reasoning which led to so happy a solution. First, he tells the friend, “dying with impatience”, that the piece of paper on which he had sketched the scarab that first cold autumn evening was, in fact, a scrap of parchment with a skull drawn on the back. Legrand had been certain, however, that there was no such drawing on the parchment when it left his hands. Greatly puzzled, when the narrator left, he had taken the mysterious piece of parchment from the drawer in which he had placed it for safety and studied it at leisure. He retraces the steps by which it fell into his hands. First the scarab had bitten his hand. Then Jupiter had picked up what appeared to be a bit of paper in which he placed the insect. Later, after handing the scarab to Lieutenant G—, Legrand had thrust the scrap of parchment in his pocket. It was on the mainland that the insect had been found. Near this spot Legrand had observed the ancient remnants of a ship’s long boat. Now, as he well knew, “the skull or death’s head” was “the well-known emblem of the pirate”.

Legrand next concentrates on each incident in his friend’s evening visit and ends by saying that, while with one hand the latter fondled

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the dog, with the other he held the parchment close enough to the fire for Legrand to think, at one moment, that it might be caught by the blaze. The action of the heat had evidently been imperfect or unequal. Legrand who, from the first, suspected his find might prove important now, therefore, subjected every portion of the parchment to glowing heat, but all that was revealed was the drawing of a kid in the lower diagonally opposite corner to that which showed the death's head. " 'I at once looked on the figure of the animal' ", explains Legrand,

" 'as a kind of punning or hieroglyphical signature . . . of one *Captain Kidd*. . . I felt irresistibly impressed with a presentiment of some vast good fortune impending' "

and that, in fact, he was on the trail to part of the legendary treasure supposedly buried by the famous pirate, and others of his ilk, along the Atlantic seaboard.

Fired with this hope, Legrand now carefully rinsed the parchment and heated it in a tin pan, whereupon, to his "inexpressible joy", four lines of cipher, traced in red, appeared between the death's head and the kid. Since, in the words of Legrand, "it may well be doubted whether human ingenuity . . . may not, by proper application, resolve" any enigma and, since "circumstances, and a certain bias of mind" had led him, like Poe, to take an interest in such riddles and successfully solve cryptographs "of an abtruseness ten thousand times greater", the unravelling of this cipher proves child's play. Thus, having determined the language used in the cipher from the signature, and having found which character, as most recurrent, must represent *e*, the most common letter in English, he is able to decipher the text with ease and to obtain the following result:

"A good glass in the Bishop's hostel in the Devil's seat—twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes—northeast and by north—main branch seventh limb east side—shoot from the left eye of the death's head—a bee-line from the tree through the shot fifty feet out".

This, however, presents a new enigma, but one which cannot long prevail against the ingenuity of the "infallible ratiocinator", for the Bishop's hostel proves to be "an irregular assemblage of cliffs and rocks" in which Legrand identifies a niche, above a projecting ledge, as the "Devil's seat". Mounting to this seat and directing a "good glass", or telescope, "north-east and by north", at an elevation of "twenty-one degrees and thirteen minutes", Legrand now obtains a view of a circular opening in the foliage of the tulip tree, within which he distinguishes a human skull. The rest of the cypher enabled him to deduce, as we saw,

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the measurements needed to unearth the treasure and to crown his efforts with untold wealth.

* * *

And what now, in his perversity, will the analyst discover as the unconscious motive for this tale, many readers will doubtless wonder? You yourself admitted, they will say, that Poe's plight made it as natural for him to dream of treasure as for his pen to write of it. And such tales were much in vogue at the time, as were also stories of Captain Kidd's buried treasures. Also, when penniless and eighteen, the young soldier who ran away from home, lived for a time on Sullivan's Island, that legendary pirate lair and ideal setting for this tale. What need to seek further and, indeed, what more could be found.

All this, however, leaves untouched the deeper sources of Poe's inspiration. We remember, for instance that, when Poe the young artilleryman landed at Fort Moultrie, he had already visited these shores, at two, when his wondering eyes fell on these sub-tropic beaches. That was sixteen years before, when he journeyed south with his actress mother. Nevertheless, he had not had her all to himself, for then a little sister accompanied the devoted pair who were all in all to each other between July and September, 1810. For it would appear that, since David Poe vanished in July 1810, leaving his wife with the little Edgar, (Henry having been left with his Baltimore grandparents almost from birth), it must have been in Norfolk, that year, that Rosalie was born.¹

The all-important problem of how children are born was thus set little Edgar very early. It is a matter of absorbing interest to every child, and each new birth in the family will serve to wake or stimulate this curiosity in the child.

Nor does this only apply to the grown-up child, as many adults assume, in their habitual underestimation of infant intelligence; an intelligence, nevertheless, which enables it to talk before it is two! As for the small Edgar, he would seem to have been an especially precocious child, both mentally and sexually, biologically linked as these are.

Thus, somewhere about two, we must imagine Edgar much

¹ The only recorded date of Rosalie's birth is an entry—necessarily made long after the event—in the Mackenzie family Bible. What is certain, however, is that Rosalie was born some months after the disappearance of David Poe. Her mother was then on tour in the South. The dates we give, therefore, though approximate, must be near enough to the facts to provide a sufficient basis for what follows.

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preoccupied with the mysterious changes in his mother's body. He must assuredly have wondered whether his little sister had not been inside his mother's body—as must all children when brothers or sisters are born—despite what adults tell them of cabbages or storks. There is also the unusual protuberance of the abdomen to bear it out, that puzzling and passing protuberance which, in the case of the young, emaciated actress, would have been especially marked.

I had not realised quite how closely Rosalie's birth preceded this journey to South Carolina, until Freud, one day, in reference to *The Gold-Bug* said something like this: "One hardly dares venture it, lest it seem too far-fetched but, there must be, in the unconscious, a connection between tales of seeking or finding treasure and some other fact or situation in the history of the race: something that belongs to a time when sacrifice was common and human sacrifice at that. The 'buried treasure', in such cases, would then be the finding of an embryo or foetus in the abdomen of the victim. . ." At the time, this seemed to me too far-fetched, and I could not see its connection with Captain Kidd's treasure. And yet, even the name of the pirate hero (Kidd = kid = child) hints at the latent content of this tale. But, in particular, it is Poe's choice of this South Carolina coast wherein to place the discovered treasure, this very coast where, in infancy, he had doubtless pondered the riddles of birth, that proves this story could not be due to chance, since chance no more exists in the psychic than in the physical world. If Legrand, like Dupin, so triumphantly solves all problems, it is doubtless to allow the little Edgar a tardy revenge for the problems he was unable to solve then, despite certain glimmers of understanding. What always stands in the way of the child's sex curiosity is his ignorance of two essential facts; the existence of semen and of the vagina. So too, the child, even when it manages to discover that the foetus lives and grows in the mother's body, has no knowledge of the womb. It therefore imagines that its small brother or sister and itself, also, were once contained, like fæces, in the mother's bowels. In consequence, it imagines that babies issue from the same orifice, the anus. These infantile anal theories survive in the unconscious of all adults, fæces and foetus there being equated; a notion to some extent justified by their anatomic proximity.

But there is yet another unconscious equation to be found at this anal level: the connection of fæces with gold, which we constantly find as a popular belief; for instance, in the almost universal idea that stepping in dung means coming wealth. The symbolism of this must be as ancient as the discovery of gold. Indeed, one Babylonian inscription defines gold

as "the excrement of hell",¹ which thus gives us one aspect of the treasure in *The Gold-Bug*. Much work has been done by psycho-analysts on the stages through which we all, as it were, phylogenetically pass from an original interest in fæces, dirt, mud and mud-pies, to what appears its very opposite; pleasure in hard, shining, clean surfaces, pebbles, coins and metals, including the most precious of all, gold.² Freud himself has strikingly shown that this transition also takes place in the unconscious of each individual, due to the repression of the child's anal-erotism, as a result of the increasing pressure exerted by its training in keeping clean.³

Though the child's first universe, however, is its own body, its second is that same body plus the vast realm of its mother's. Small wonder then that this latter, from which it draws food and warmth, should come to seem of unique and all-absorbing importance and that, only gradually, does it learn that other and separate objects exist.

Thus, when the child, at about two, enters the anal-erotic stage, marked by a transfer of libidinal interest from the oral to the anal zone, its first interest in the mother's milk and breasts enlarges to include whatever issues from her body and, in especial, the excreta which, at this time, are of such importance to it. These excreta, being the first gift the child can make the mother—a gift she elicits by her care—the child must, in return, imagine that the mother may make it a similar gift. The mother's excreta, therefore, to the child's unconscious—not then distinct from its conscious mind—must seem endowed with the potency

¹ Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients* (*The Old Testament in the Light of the Ancient East*), 2nd Edition, 1906, p. 216, and *Babylonisches im Neuen Testament* (*Babylonian Elements in the New Testament*), 1906, p. 96: "Mamon (Mammon) is in Babylonian *man-man*, a surname of Nergal, god of hell. According to the mythology of the East, which has passed into the tales and legends of other peoples, gold is the excrement of hell; see *Monotheistische Strömungen innerhalb der babylonischen Religion* (*Monotheistic Currents in Babylonian Religion*, p. 16, note 1." Following Freud, *Character and Anal Erotism*, *Collected Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 45–50. *Charakter und Analerotik*, 1908. Ges. Werke, Band VII.

² Ferenczi, *The Origin of the Interest in Money*, in *Contributions to Psychoanalysis* (Boston: Richard G. Badger). Translated from *Zur Ontogenie des Geldinteresses*, *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* II, 1914, and *Bausteine zur Psychoanalyse*, *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, 1927, Vol. I.

³ FREUD, *On the Transformation of Instincts, with Special Reference to Anal Erotism*, *Collected Papers*, II, pp. 164–171. Trans. from *Über Triebumsetzungen, insbesondere der Analerotik*, 1916. Ges. Werke, Band X.

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and nourishing virtue it has already associated with her milk. We still find incontestable traces of such concepts, so far removed from our adult mentality in folklore and—harking back to gold being equated with *fæces*—in the numerous tales of animals (always mother-symbols) which yield gold instead of dung, as in the French tale of *Peau d'âne*.¹ Moreover, by a detour, the story of *The Goose and the Golden Eggs* furnishes the formula *fæces* = *foetus* = gold and I, personally, have been able to observe a psychopath who phantasied that counterfeiters had imprisoned a woman to mould and coin her *fæces* into money. The day this phantasy emerged in analysis, the patient had just spent his last penny in the hope that, by lamenting his plight, the analyst (a woman and so a mother-figure) would feel forced to give him money. Strangely enough, though all but impotent, the patient was convinced that he would become fully potent if some woman would consent to defecate upon him. It was thus clearly demonstrated that the gift of money or gold was the equivalent to him, first of the original *fæces*-gift the child desired from its mother and, then, of the equally primitive gift of the mother's love, its first tangible proof being her milk. In this patient, we see, unchanged from its original form—that is before *fæces* symbolism is fully converted into that of gold—the mentality of the men who get themselves supported by women. Whatever appellations Society may use to belittle men of this type, understandable enough in an age where “fight and succeed” is the inexorable economic law, these men are none the less to be pitied as being, to some extent, fixated at the infantile stage of dependence on a mother's care. Nor was Poe, himself, entirely free from this tendency, for Muddy supported him by her needle and at times begged for him, and he accepted aid when his poverty was greatest—though chiefly for his ailing Virginia—from Mrs. Osgood and Mrs. Shew, when he was courting them. Twice, also, towards the end of this life, he all but married women whose wealth was one, at least, of their attractions.

Yet though the child's first universe is its body and the second, that of its mother annexed to its own, by degrees the child grows aware of a world distinct from both. Then the day comes when earth itself is conceived as the all-prolific, all-nurturing, source of life. Since the child in each of us never dies, the carry-over from the time when its mother was the whole world to it invests the universe, in the unconscious, with all the attributes of the mother. Thus the earth, which bears and

Perrault, *Histoires et contes du temps passé avec des moralités* (anonyme), Paris, Claude Barbin, 1697.

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feeds us like the mother, in time becomes the concrete symbol of a vast mother.

In *The Gold-Bug*, we find that the earth replaces, for Poe, the mother with whom, at two, in his early anal-erotic phase, he visited the shores where later Legrand was to discover Captain Kidd's treasure. And in the same way that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* might be described as an epic search for *milk* on the mother's body—symbolized by oceans of fluid, that being the form of substance dominant in the babe's oral-erotic stage—so the story of Legrand is an epic search for the mother's *fæces*, inside her body, symbolized here by the earth, since solids are the dominant substance in the child's anal-erotic phase. Hints of this second search were, indeed, to be seen in that episode in Pym's narrative where he and Peters wander amid the black, metal-flecked walls of the island's chasms, which we have already noted as symbolizing bowels.

Nor could it have been chance that made Poe select the scarab, or dung-beetle, to operate the discovery of this treasure in the bowels of the earth. And here, again, we may perhaps see another example of that universality which governs man's psychic life, for the ball of dung which the Sacred Scarab of the Egyptians rolls under its feet also, for them, symbolized the golden sun.

Here, it may be said that we are contradicting ourselves, for earlier we asserted that it was curiosity about the mystery of birth, activated in Edgar by Rosalie's advent, which provided the infantile root from which *The Gold-Bug* sprang, whereas now we say that it originated in the symbolic search for the mother's *fæces*, represented by Captain Kidd's gold.

Let us, for the moment, leave aside the fourth unconscious equivalent, that of the penis;¹ the penis which the little boy attributes to all humans and in particular to his mother, before he discovers sex differences; and confine ourselves to the three equivalents already given: *fæces*—gold—*foetus*. True, it was Rosalie's birth that spurred Edgar's anal curiosity as regards the mother, but consideration of the times when it appears reactivated, throws a strange light on its divagations and development, as we see in *The Gold-Bug*. For, as we saw, it was at eighteen, when he fled from John Allan's mansion to abandon, forever, both expectations and foster-family, that Poe revisited that Carolina coast he had first seen with his ailing mother and new-born sister. Yet, in that home of John Allan's, Edgar had left a second and likewise very ill mother, though Frances Allan differed from Elizabeth Arnold in that she remained

¹ Freud, op. cit., page 364, note 3.

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childless, so sparing him any baby rival to her affection. And whereas his poor but fecund mother had left no inheritance but his little sister, the sterile though rich mother, Frances—his unconscious told him and so, indeed, she would have wished—would have left him much wealth when she died, as soon happened.

Had she not already heaped him with gifts when she brought him from his mother's pallet to her rich home? Unconsciously therefore, Edgar, disinherited by John Allan, would naturally conjure up visions of great bequests from the rich mother who had once loved him and gratified each wish.

These thoughts must especially have harassed him in 1842, when *The Gold-Bug* was written. Poe, who must have imagined fortune within his grasp with his great—and for him, unprecedented—success as editor of *Graham's Magazine*, now lost that post and could see fortune again begin to desert him. His outlook, too, was further darkened by Virginia's worsened condition for it was, in fact, in January 1842 that her first hæmoptysis occurred, in the dramatic manner we have already related. Other and similar attacks were to follow, each more difficult than the last for him to bear. Nevertheless, these premonitory symptoms also filled him with strange pleasure; that of reliving—in his unconscious—the cherished past: a past when, at two, he had clung to his mother from whose breast, also, the blood flowed and when, at twenty, as a young soldier, he had reached Richmond too late to find his second and rich mother alive. The reader will recall that, despite his wife's entreaties, John Allan delayed summoning Edgar to her deathbed, with the result that she died without ever again seeing her Eddy. John Allan had even hastened her burial, unheeding her dying request that Eddy, at least, should see her dead. All that remained for him was to lament and swoon on her grave. We also know how John Allan observed his other promise—not to abandon Edgar—which she drew from him on her deathbed. Yet the legacy she left Edgar was to exceed silver and gold, seeing that, in part, it was *The Gold-Bug*.

Nor is it mere chance that the box enclosing the treasure is of *oblong* shape and so like a coffin: a coffin evocative of his beloved and dead mothers. But here the dead are removed from the box and set above it, as though the guardians of the treasure. Their bones lie loose in the earth and a skull is nailed to the tree branch. One cannot help thinking that the two skeletons, here presented as Kidd's confederates in burying this treasure who, according to pirate custom, he murdered when their task was done, also implied something else in Poe's unconscious;

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namely, the parents overtaken by death. Primarily these were his own, whose embraces—which the child always interprets as the father's sadistic attack—he doubtless had ample occasion to observe, given the promiscuity in which the poor strolling players would have lived. But, also, they would represent his foster-parents, John and Frances Allan. As we know, all four were dead when *The Gold-Bug* was written and the latter, and wealthy couple, should have left him their wealth.

That Poe acknowledged that the treasure yielded up to her son by the Earth-Mother was, despite his wife's generosity, John Allan's possession, we see from the manner in which the pirate legend is used in this tale. This treasure, hoarded by rapine and terror, had once belonged to a pirate as, in Poe's unconscious, the dour merchant must have seemed. Note that it is not earth alone which here yields up her riches to the son, for then we should have had him discover a gold or diamond mine. No, it is the mother who delivers up the father's treasure. And this Frances Allan would surely have done, had she survived her husband and inherited his money, by sharing with and bequeathing it to her Edgar. Poe's consolation was to compensate himself for reality by turning to fiction. In *The Gold-Bug*, we see him compelling the Virginia mother-earth—even to the point of "transposing" its Ragged Mountains to Carolina—which in succession, had swallowed his mothers, to restore the treasure with which the second, rich mother would have dowered him, could she have done.

We shall have occasion later to speak of the skull nailed to the branch, and the curious device by which a gold scarab dropped through the eye-socket serves to locate the treasure, when we come to the blinding and hanging of the *Black Cat*, in the story bearing that name. Only then shall we be able to make clear to the reader the phallic significance of the golden insect, and complete the series of equivalents, symbolic of gold, to which we earlier referred. We shall also show how this manner of using the scarab, in relation to the eye-socket of a head picked by crows, implies reproach of the mother.

Thus this tale, apparently so rational and objective and, like *The Raven*, written with a deliberate eye to success—a success which, indeed, it obtained¹—this tale, from which the subjective seems wholly absent is, in fact, charged with personal, emotional and autobiographical significance and digs its roots deep in Poe's past. *The Gold-Bug*, with its stream of treasure from the earth's bowels is again, like the story of Arthur

¹ Cf. Poe to Thomas, May 4, 1845. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 205.)

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Gordon Pym, a sort of epic of the beneficent, nurturing mother, but with the difference that now the emphasis is on the wealth hidden in her bowels and, no longer, on the primal gift of milk from her breasts.

* * *

Enough has been said to give the reader some idea of the vast extent of the symbolism with which the idea of the mother may be endowed in the human unconscious. The earth, the sea, and "all that in them is", may thus at times assume the impressive though, oft, vague features of the great maternal deities, Cybele or Astarte, whom our forebears worshipped. And it is not alone our planet, but all those heavenly bodies within reach of the eye, which equally may represent them. Did not Poe himself, at nineteen, sing of Nesace and Ligeia in his "astral" poem *Al Aaraaf* and, later, fly his Hans Pfaall to the moon in what is again an immense womb-phantasy? We shall not pause to analyse this tale (*The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Pfaall*), whose latent meaning is simple enough to psycho-analysts but would be difficult to convey to others. Suffice it to cite, in support of our general argument, the headlong plunge of the hero from the balloon (symbolic of birth), the three kittens born to his cat during the ascent, and the choice of the hero's name. Poe may well have known that Pfahl in German means *stake* or *pile*, an object whose phallic character well accords with the part the thus-named hero plays as regards the moon as mother-symbol, and which is apparently confirmed by a curious lapse Poe frequently made in letters, calling his hero Hans Phaall.¹

All voyages to the moon, an ever-recurring human phantasy, always, in their deepest sense, represent a yearning to return to the mother. Moreover, most of the tales of exploration and adventure beloved by children, both before and after *Treasure Island* and the stories of Jules Verne, stem from the same unconscious infantile curiosity in regard to the mother's body which, we saw, produced *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *The Gold-Bug*. The deceptive "innocence" of such tales results from the fact that, for the most part, their oral and anal elements express the libido at the pregenital level.

¹ Cf. *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, pp. 11, 12, and 18. In some versions of the tale, Poe suppressed one *l*, spelling the name *Pfaal*. The traveller to the moon may owe his name to an unconscious condensation of *phallus* and the German *Pfeil* or *arrow*: a *phallic arrow*, that is, launched into the moon.

The Confession of Impotence

CHAPTER XXXIV

Loss of Breath¹

THAT Poe, throughout life, retained his "innocence", an innocence determined by his impotence, is testified not only by what we know of his life, but by his works: works which, according to Baudelaire "contain not a single passage in any way licentious or even sensual"—or, we would add, of the fulfilment of love. There is no clearer evidence of this, to the analyst, than the story *Loss of Breath*.

Loss of Breath, which forms part of the first series of *The Tales of the Folio Club*, is also a tale of the "grotesque", to which Poe added the sub-title *A Tale à la Blackwood* though, later, he changed this into *A Tale neither in nor out of "Blackwood"*. To-day, *Loss of Breath* seems to the reader somewhat like those "surrealist" films which present a series of unlinked images emanating from the unconscious.

Poe begins by declaring that:

"The most notorious fortune must in the end, yield to the untiring courage of philosophy—as the most stubborn city to the ceaseless vigilance of an enemy".

As examples he cites Samaria, Nineveh, Troy and Azoth, which latter

"opened at last her gates to Psammitticus, after having barred them for the fifth part of a century".

Following this preamble, which would appear totally unrelated to the subject, did we not recall that captured cities often represent captured women, Poe, without transition, embarks on his tale:

¹ *Loss of Breath, A Tale neither in nor out of "Blackwood"*: *Southern Literary Messenger*, September 1835; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 26.

My quotations are taken from *The Broadway Journal* text, revised in accordance with MS. notes by Poe in a copy of the tale given by him to Mrs. Whitman, and follow the *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2.

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“‘Thou wretch!—thou vixen!—thou shrew!’ said I to my wife on the morning after our wedding, ‘thou witch! thou hag!—thou whipper-snapper!—thou sink of iniquity!—thou fiery-faced quintessence of all that is abominable!—thou—thou—’ here standing upon tiptoe, seizing her by the throat, and placing my mouth close to her ear, I was preparing to launch forth a new and more decided epithet of opprobrium, which should not fail, if ejaculated, to convince her of her insignificance, when, to my extreme horror and astonishment, I discovered that *I had lost my breath.*”

Such are the terms in which Poe pictures the morning after a wedding. In place of the genital act performed in darkness, we have a verbal and sadistic attack in the day, which these insults represent while, at the very moment the husband seizes his wife to attack her, we find his powers suddenly fail and that, for want of breath, he cannot “ejaculate” the penetrating words.

“The phrases ‘I am out of breath’, ‘I have lost my breath’, &c., are often enough repeated in common conversation; but it had never occurred to me that the terrible accident of which I speak could *bona fide* and actually happen! Imagine—that is if you have a fanciful turn—imagine, I say, my wonder—my consternation—my despair!”

Our hero, however, does not lose his self-possession.

“Although I could not at first precisely ascertain to what degree the occurrence had affected me, I determined at all events to conceal the matter from my wife, until further experience should discover to me the extent of this my unheard of calamity. Altering my countenance, therefore, in a moment, from its beuffed and distorted appearance, to an expression of arch and coquettish benignity, I gave my lady a pat on one cheek and a kiss on the other, and without saying one syllable, (Furies! I could not), left her astonished at my drollery, as I pirouetted out of the room in a *Pas de Zéphyr.*”

Thus the hero of the tale can once more boast, in the words of Rousseau: “*et le chemin des passions me conduit à la philosophie véritable*”.¹

Poe’s real impotence, too, must have seemed to him the “truest philosophy”. In spite of his “consternation” and “despair” at losing his “breath” for good he, also, must have put a good face on his ill fortune. His consolation was to make a virtue of necessity, as the impotent so often do. He alone was capable of pure love! No one before had felt such ardent or ethereal passion! Nor would anyone after him! Thus, as of right, he could despise

¹ And I was led to true philosophy by the path of passion.

Loss of Breath

those who—like John Allan with his harem—wallowed in the mire of fleshly delights. And since irony is a way to overcome misfortune, he could turn his impotence into a “humorous tale”. Poe’s humour, however, is always sinister and but thinly covers his ill-hap.

Yet, we ask, why should Poe rob his hero of breath for wishing to shout into his new bride’s ear? Doubtless, the fact that the hero is *shouting*, when he should be thinking of doing something else, has its relation to his recent encounter—when the story was written—with the young cousin who would soon become his child-wife. We see here a defence-reaction against the later temptations of carnal desire, plus memory traces, from deep in the past, of the manner in which this impotence was established. This must have happened before he was three, while still in the anal-sadistic stage, for his libido, then fixated on the beloved mother never, thereafter, renounced its object and rendered him impotent for life.

“Behold me then” continues the hero, “safely ensconced in my private *boudoir*, a fearful instance of the ill consequences attending upon irascibility—alive, with the qualifications of the dead—dead, with the propensities of the living—an anomaly on the face of the earth—being very calm, yet breathless. . .”

We could ask no better description of the impotent man’s plight.

“Yes! breathless. I am serious in asserting that my breath was entirely gone. I could not have stirred with it a feather if my life had been at issue, or sullied even the delicacy of a mirror.”

But now our hero discovers that he is not wholly speechless, as he at first feared. By lowering his voice to “a singularly deep guttural”, he can emit sounds dependent

“not upon the current of the breath, but upon a certain spasmodic action of the muscles of the throat”.

These, the analyst would be inclined to interpret as an intestinal, pre-genital language, replacing the strictly genital type of speech symbolized by respiration, the guttural sounds marking a regression to an earlier infantile and hence, impotent, stage of libidinal development.

Nevertheless, the unfortunate hero throws himself into a chair and is assailed by the most sombre reflections. He even thinks of suicide but rejects this with a shudder. Meanwhile

“the tabby cat purred strenuously upon the rug, and the very water-dog wheezed assiduously under the table; each taking to itself much

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merit for the strength of its lungs, and all obviously done in derision of my own pulmonary 'incapacity'".

Eventually he hears his wife go out and, assured he is alone, with palpitating heart returns to the scene of the disaster.

There, after locking the door, he begins a vigorous search. He thinks it possible, he tells us,

"that concealed in some . . . closet or drawer, might be found the lost object of my inquiry. It might have a vapory—it might even have a tangible form".

Male potency, which we here find symbolized by breath has, of course, its "tangible form". We shall see later why Poe's unconscious here prefers to symbolise it as "vapory" breath.

"Long and earnestly did I continue the investigation: but the contemptible reward of my industry and perseverance proved to be only a set of false teeth, two pair of hips, an eye, and a bundle of *billets-doux* from Mr. Windenough to my wife. I might as well here observe that this confirmation of my lady's partiality for Mr. W. occasioned me little uneasiness. That Mrs. Lacko'breath should admire anything so dissimilar to myself was a natural and necessary evil. I am, it is well-known, of a robust and corpulent appearance, and at the same time somewhat diminutive in stature. What wonder then that the lath-like tenuity of my acquaintance, and his altitude, which has grown into a proverb, should have met with all due estimation in the eyes of Mrs. Lacko'breath."

The undersized husband, we now learn, has a successful rival in the person of the lank, skinny Mr. Windenough, who has no difficulty in using *his* "breath". Small wonder, thinks Mr. Lacko'breath, since women are made that way! He resigns himself to the inevitable, and thus again demonstrates how truly philosophical he is. The identity of his lucky rival we shall seek to discover later.

"My exertions," continues our hero,

"proved fruitless. Closet after closet—drawer after drawer—corner after corner—were scrutinized to no purpose. At one time, however, I thought myself sure of my prize, having in rummaging a dressing-case, accidentally demolished a bottle of Grandjean's Oil of Archangels—which, as an agreeable perfume, I here take the liberty of recommending."

Soon convinced of his error, however, he returns with a heavy heart to his boudoir—

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“there to ponder upon some method of eluding my wife’s penetration, until I could make arrangements prior to my leaving the country”, for “. . . In a foreign climate . . . I might, with some probability of success, endeavour to conceal my unhappy calamity—a calamity calculated, even more than beggary, to estrange the affections of the multitude . . .”

Mr. Lacko’breath, thereupon, begins to memorise an entire tragedy, that of *Metamora*, where the tones of voice beyond his range are unnecessary whereas, for the leading role, “the deep guttural was expected to reign monotonously throughout”.

For some time he practises his part “by the borders of a well frequented marsh”, as Demosthenes by the sea-shore and, when he feels sufficiently sure of his progress, determines to make his wife believe him ‘suddenly smitten with a passion for the stage.’

“In this, I succeeded to a miracle; and to every question or suggestion found myself at liberty to reply in my most frog-like and sepulchral tones with some passage from the tragedy—any portion of which, as I soon took great pleasure in observing, would apply equally well to any particular subject. It is not to be supposed, however, that in the delivery of such passages I was found at all deficient in the looking askint—the showing my teeth—the working my knees—the shuffling my feet—or in any of those unmentionable graces which are now justly considered the characteristics of a popular performer. To be sure they spoke of confining me in a straight-jacket—but, good God! they never suspected me of having lost my breath.”

* * *

Let us pause here to recall the mediocre tragedian—as contemporary testimony unanimously affirms—who was Poe’s father and who must often, in Edgar’s hearing, have memorised aloud and ranted his “mata-morish”¹ parts, in the guttural tones affected by indifferent tragedians. Edgar, it is true, was only eighteen months, when his father abandoned the family in New York, but unconscious memories reach far into the past. Since indifferent tragedians are legion, those who subsequently entered Mr. Placide’s company—with which Edgar’s mother stayed till he was three—might well, by fusing with his memories of his father, have helped to keep that memory alive. We have no means of knowing whether, or

¹ Braggart; bully; hector.

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how often, Edgar was taken to the theatre to gaze with wondering eyes at his mother rehearsing, but it seems unlikely that so precocious a child, the son and grandson of players, would be kept away from the stage on which his mother spent her life and where, it is said, he even himself appeared.¹

To us, therefore, it would seem that although Mr. Lacko'breath primarily represents Poe in his impotent aspect, certain details reveal his father, the ranting tragedian. Like Poe's father, Mr. Lacko'breath is suddenly "smitten with a passion for the stage"—a passion which, in fact, made David Poe abandon his home and his father, the general. In other words, Poe, in this grotesque character, ironically identifies himself with his father or, rather, his father with himself. We have here a sort of posthumous revenge which the unconscious takes on the father; it is as though the child deep in Poe sought to insinuate, in this burlesque of the wish, that his father, the envied rival as regards the mother was, possibly, no more potent than himself!

There is, however, another character, so far but briefly mentioned by the narrator who, nevertheless, is of prime importance as regards the hero, and who will only emerge in all his glory towards the end of the tale. This is Mr. Lacko'breath's successful rival, the fortunate Mr. Windenough, whom we here see in all the panoply of potency, with far more breath than he needs; indeed, with more than anybody, as we shall see. In him we see the father in all his potency, the begetter to whom the mother belongs and whom she prefers above all others, as witness the love-letters guarded so preciously in the drawer where they are found. This imaginary packet of letters, and what they reveal, reminds us, however, of other and real letters; letters which played so important and, possibly, a similar part in Poe's life; namely, the packet left by Elizabeth Arnold, which contained her miniature, her sketch of the port of Boston, a pocket-book, some locks of hair and a jewel case, and which was all she could bequeath her two children when she died, before Edgar went to the Allans, and Rosalie to the Mackenzies. The jewel case, apparently, accompanied Rosalie when she visited Fordham in 1846. Later, Mrs. Clemm is thought to have burnt the letters.² During his life, Poe is said to have treasured them, as he did everything connected with his mother. Had he read them, however? It seems doubtful, given his repressions and his fears of discovering what, doubtless, he suspected and what, possibly, they contained: proof of his mother's infidelity and the illegitimacy of his sister.

¹ *Israfil*, p. 20.

Cf. op. cit., pp. 13, 24, 141 and 727, and pages 6, 7, 27, 28 of the present work.

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Be that as it may, there was certainly doubt, at the time, about Rosalie's legitimacy. The date of her birth is uncertain, and our only record, as we have said, is the much later entry, in the Mackenzie family Bible, that Rosalie was born at Norfolk in December, 1810: *i.e.*, six months after David Poe's disappearance in New York. Whether he did, in fact, die in October, 1810, as reported at this time in the single newspaper cutting we possess,¹ or after Rosalie's birth, we know that, when she was born, he had vanished from his wife's life, a fact which, given Elizabeth Arnold's profession, would well have sufficed to breed gossip. John Allan would certainly have made the most of these doubts, since he but little approved his wife's fostering of a child of strolling players. In the bitter and recriminatory letter John Allan wrote to Henry Poe in November, 1824, he manages to insert:

"Between you, your poor sister Rosalie may not suffer. At least she is half your sister and God forbid my dear Henry that we should visit upon the living the errors of the dead."²

It was doubtless the wish to refute such insinuations—which must cruelly have hurt the pride of a charity-child—that made Poe, with his usual indifference to dates, advance that of his father's death and even, for instance, write in a letter to his cousin, William Poe:

"My father David died when I was in the second year of my age, and when my sister Rosalie was an infant in arms. Our mother died a few weeks before him",³

a statement which, apart from the first assertion, was clearly untrue, as Poe, indeed, must have very well known. The key to the mystery which so preyed upon him, and thus made him alter these dates, doubtless lay in this packet of old letters. Did anyone ever read them? Possibly Mrs. Clemm, before burning them. In any case, if the loving, simple Muddy ever discovered the secret, she took it with her to the grave.

Of one thing, however, we may be sure: fact or phantasy, the idea that his mother had betrayed his father assumed enormous importance in Poe's unconscious life. As a result, it finally remained as fact in his psyche, whatever the basis for it in the past, much in the way that the young Napoleon

¹ Cf. page 362, note and page 2, note.

² *Israfel*, p. 125.

³ Poe to William Poe, Richmond, August 20, 1835 (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 15).

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reacted to Lætitia Bonaparte's supposed intrigue with Governor de Marbeuf.¹

In the case of Elizabeth Arnold, the supposition seems more likely to be true. The infidelity of the ailing, English actress, seems more credible than that of the "Corsican Cornelia". I have not been able to discover on what grounds Hervey Allen asserts that "all the authentic dates and the known facts show that the suspicion which was thus afterward thrown upon the memory of Mrs. Poe was not only cruel but untrue".² We have no real record of Rosalie's birth, and those concerned at the time thought that Elizabeth Arnold's letters were best burnt: one may therefore wonder whether Hervey Allen's defence of his heroine is not dictated by the Puritan American attitude to such matters, in spite of the present prevalence of adultery, in America as elsewhere, and the general tolerance with which it is regarded.

I, myself, incline to the view of adultery, given the lapse of over a century, but nothing can now be affirmed. Yet, it seems to me that in Mr. Windenough, Poe combines characteristics of both his mother's lover and her husband and, this, by a wholly unconscious process, of which he could not be aware. So, too, our dreams are constructed and remain, for the most part, un-understood. It is, in fact, the analyst's task to unravel the latent meaning thus hid in our dreams and waking phantasies.

The principal and characteristic feature of this imaginary character, a feature common to both husband and real or imagined lover, is power of breath; that breath which engendered Henry, Edgar and subsequently Rosalie. We shall now examine the symbolism of this breath and seek to determine how Poe, impotent, came to choose breathing and breath as symbol of male potency.

* * *

In that outstanding work, *The Madonna's Conception through the Ear*,³ Ernest Jones demonstrates that, as originally conceived, the legend of the Annunciation implied that the Virgin was impregnated by the angel's

¹ Cf. the fine study by L. JEKELS, *Der Wendepunkt im Leben Napoleons I, Imago*, IV, 1914. (Abstract in English, *The Psychoanalytic Review*, VII, 278-295.)

² *Israfel*, pp. 14-15.

³ JONES, E., *The Madonna's Conception through the Ear*, first published in German (*Die Empfängnis der Jungfrau Maria durch das Ohr*) in *Jahrbuch der Psychoanalyse*, 1914, Vol. VI. Quotations and references from *Essays in Applied Psycho-Analysis*, 1923, London: Hogarth Press & Inst. of Psycho-Analysis, p. 261.

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words and the breath of God or the Holy Ghost, which are one, entering her ear.¹ In St. Augustine's words: "*Deus per angelum loquebatur et Virgo per aurem imprægnebatur*". In their breviary the Maronites are equally explicit: "*Verbum patris per aurem benedictæ intravit*"² and, in a hymn to Thomas a Becket as to St. Bonaventura, we find:

*Gaude, Virgo, mater Christi,
Quæ per aurem concepisti,
Gabriele nuntio.
Gaude, quia Deo plena
Peperisti sine pena
Cum pudoris lilio.*

Jones also quotes a French version of this hymn of the seventeenth century:

Rejouissez-vous, Vierge, et Mère bienheureuse,
Qui dans vos chastes flancs conçeutes par l'ouyr,
L'Esprit-Saint opérant d'un très-ardent désir,
Est l'Ange l'annonçant d'une voix amoureuse.³

Again, St. Eleutherius thus addresses the Virgin: "*O Vierge bénie . rendue mère sans la coopération de l'homme! Car ici l'oreille fut l'épouse, le verbe angélique l'époux*".⁴

Following Jones, we might add many a similar quotation from the Fathers of the Church and other ecclesiastical writers, but content ourselves with observing (to quote this author) that myths relating to the conception of gods or heroes by the ear are not special to Christianity, though there it possibly reaches its highest perfection. Shigemuni, the Mongol saviour, for instance, having chosen the most perfect of earthly virgins, Mahænna or Maya, for mother, impregnated her while she slept by entering her right ear while, in the Mâhabhârata, Kunti, the very pure virgin and later mother of the hero Karna, (whose name signifies breath), is similarly impregnated by the sun god.

Now, it is just this channel which Poe's burlesque hero chooses through which to approach his wife. The difference in attitude between a religious legend, and an extravaganza, in no way affects the significance of the symbols on which they are based, and it is here worth recalling that Rabelais' Gargantua was also born from his mother's ear.

¹ *Sermo de tempore*, XXII.

² Bodley MS. Latin Liturgy, Fol. X, Vol. 91.

³ Langlois, *Essai sur la peinture sur verre*, 1832, p. 157.

⁴ St. Eleutherius Tornacensis, *Serm. in Annunt. Fest.*, Tome 65, p. 96.

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We will now turn from the female ear as a receptive organ, to the engendering male breath and ignore the symbolism of the Dove, to which Jones consecrates a chapter, for this will not concern us here since Poe, in his story, omits the bird, offspring of the wind, in favour of wind itself, or breath. Nevertheless, this extensively documented work demonstrates that breath and, by extension, all aspects of wind, are endowed with fecundative powers. Thus the mouth, as orifice, serves at times as a female symbol; it may also readily become, thanks to its phallic tongue and its ability to spit or blow, a male potency symbol.

The concept of breath as a creative and fecundating force is thus expressed in *Genesis*: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul".¹

Or in the words of the Psalmist: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth".²

If, from the theogony of the Old Testament we turn to mythology and folklore, we find winds universally conceived as fecundating. And not only of the earth and the fruits thereof, but of animals and women, whether mortals or goddesses. Was not Hera, in Greek mythology, made pregnant by the wind, to whom she bore Hephæstus; and do not the women of the Aruntas of Central Australia fly shrieking to their huts when the west wind blows, believing it bears the seed of children?³ At one time, it was believed by the Ancients that the women of Cyprus could only conceive in this manner, and an infinite number of such beliefs might be cited. Similar beliefs have also been attached to animals. Freud, in his study of *Leonardo da Vinci*, has noted the ancient belief that all vultures were female and conceived by presenting the cloaca to the wind,⁴ a belief so widely held that Origen cites it to substantiate the Virgin Birth of Jesus. In Samoa, a similar capacity is attributed to snipe⁵ and, in antiquity, by St. Augustine to the mares of Cappadocia⁶, by Virgil to those of Bœotia,⁷ and by Pliny to those of Lusi-

¹ *Genesis*, II, 7.

² *Psalms*, 33, 6.

³ Strehlow, *Die Aranda-und Loritja-Stämme in Zentralaustralien*, 1907, p. 14.

⁴ *Leonardo da Vinci: A Psycho-Sexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, London, Kegan Paul, 1922. *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci*, 1910: *Ges. Werke*, Band VIII.

⁵ Sierich, *Samoaanische Märchen*. (Int. Arch. für Ethnographie, XVI, 90.)

⁶ *Civ. Dei*, XXI, 5.

⁷ *Georgics*, III, 266-76.

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tania.¹ Aristotle² and Pliny³ both tell us that partridges might also be similarly fertilised should the wind blow from the cock, a legend which recalls the pollination of certain plants, and leads us back to the common origin of all these tales of wind-fertilisation. Clearly, all such tales and beliefs are in origin anthropomorphic, and were only projected upon the winds of heaven when the father, himself, had been relegated there.

How was it, however, that in the unconscious, men came to substitute breath, or wind (that is the breath of our Father in Heaven), for the generative fluid and, what "flows" from the mouth, for what issues from the penis? We have already shown that the mouth, as an orifice furnished with tongue, saliva and breath, may symbolise both male and female genitals. Nevertheless, there is a connecting link and one so far unmentioned, which provides us with the first and infantile prototype of an organ strikingly able to blow. This is the anus, whose functions,—with due apologies to civilised adults, in whom anal-erotism is strongly repressed—are charged, for the child, with intense libidinal interest. Object as one may that breathing is far more important and vital than breaking wind, it is the latter which most interests the child. Here a distinction must be made between vital and libidinal. Though our lives depend on respiration as on the circulatory system, analysis shows that we do not find these represented in the unconscious to anything like the same extent as the functions which carry a libidinal charge, be they anal, oral, phallic or, later, truly genital. One must be asthmatic to worry about breathing. Displaced from below, however, it is intestinal flatus which invests the vital act of respiration with the libidinal interest we find attached to it in story, myth and legend.

That this importance actually attaches to flatus we have abundant proof, not only from contemporary psycho-analyses, but also from writings handed down to us from earliest antiquity.

"The *pneuma*" (of the Greeks), writes Jones,

"coursed through the entire body, regulated nutrition, generated thought and semen, and, according to Aristotle, conveyed to the head movements of sensation that had been transmitted to it from without through the medium of the sense organs; on the state of it depended the health of the individual".

With the Greeks, the

¹ *Hist. nat.*, VIII, 67.

² *Hist. anim.*, V, 4.

³ *op. cit.*, X, 51. This and previous references from Jones, *op. cit.*, page 380.

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“conception of respiration was a singularly broad one, many processes being included under the term besides that of breathing. Aristotle, for example, positively states that the pneuma of the body, the importance of which we have just noted, is not derived from the breath, but is a secretion resulting from processes going on within the body itself (primarily in the intestine), and Galen says, even more explicitly, that the psychic pneuma is derived in part from the vapours of digested food.”

Again,

“the Greeks thought of the respiratory and alimentary systems as being throughout closely connected. . . They not only identified the absorption of air, its subsequent changes within the body, and its final excretion, with those of food, but ascribed to the influence of the former the process whereby the latter becomes sufficiently rarefied to be carried over the body; the underlying idea, with of course many modifications, seems to have been that the inspired air reached the stomach, either through the bloodstream or through the œsophagus (which they believed led to the heart), and there digested the food, the internal pneuma being the product of this, and thus representing a combination of air and food. From this point of view,” concludes Jones, “it is clear that pneuma was not merely a symbolic equivalent of intestinal gas, but was actually and grossly identical with it . . .”¹

The Vedic conception was similar to that of the Greeks. To the Indian philosophers, five Prânas or breaths were to be distinguished in man. The first, or true Prâna, the “up-breathing”, means essentially the breath proper. The second, Apâna, the “down-breathing”, is the wind of digestion, residing in the bowels. It originates in the navel of the primæval man . . . and presides over the organs of evacuation and generation. The third, the

“Vyâna, or ‘back-going’ wind, unites the breath proper to the wind of digestion and courses through the blood vessels. The Samâna, or ‘all-breathing’, unites the Prâna to the Apâna, and carries the food over the body. These two last-mentioned breaths evidently make up together the Greek ‘internal pneuma’. Finally, the Udâna, the ‘up- or out-breathing’, sometimes called the wind of exit, dwells in the throat, and either brings up again or swallows down that which is eaten or drunk. The Udâna, which evidently denotes gas regurgitating from a flatulent stomach, is an interesting counterpart to the Apâna, for while the latter

¹ This, and the preceding quotations, from Jones, op. cit., pp. 296-298, after Brett, *A History of Psychology, Ancient and Patristic*, 1912, pp. 118, 291.

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is formally identified with death itself, the former carries away the soul from the body after death; the connection between them is naturally a close one, since they both represent intestinal gas, which may escape either upwards or downwards.”¹

It may seem strange that the child's or primitive's first concepts of breathing, or of any act of creation, should be the activities of the bowels. Yet, if for a moment we lay aside our adult prejudices and criticism, and put ourselves in place of the child, it is sufficiently comprehensible. For, to the child, its first creation is what comes from its body, whether fæces or urine, the former being the more highly prized since it is solid, and does not run off like water. The noises, too, which often accompany elimination, greatly please the child before this pleasure is inhibited by its upbringing; they signify to it powerful and valorous deeds, traces of which singular pride may be observed in many individuals of primitive mentality.²

Yet the impressiveness of such noises is incalculably magnified when, like veritable *thunderings*, they issue from that dreaded, mighty being, the father. They then fill the child's soul with fear and awe, and are later readily transformed into the thunder-bolts of Zeus or the rumble of Thor's hammer.

To this a last fact must be added which gives wind, breath, and breathing such prime importance; namely, that the small child is often present at the sex acts of adults, too heedless of its sensitiveness to such impressions. What it then sees leaves indelible traces in the unconscious—traces which later analysis reveals. Actually, the child already bears within it larval instinctual mechanisms which, strange though this seem to the thoughtless or ill-informed adult, make it particularly sensitive to, and observant of, similar instinctual manifestations in others.

Two senses in particular are concerned in the child's awareness of adult coitus and those the “noblest”, sight and hearing; hearing, above all, since the sex act commonly takes place in darkness. And what, to the ear, most characterises coitus, if not its panting breath, its sighs and moans and—even, at times, gross as it seems—the sound of the woman breaking wind, as a result of abdominal compression in the coital position. At such times, as analysis proves, the child habitually attributes such *thunderings* to the father; the omnipotent father he dreads and whom he imagines, in coitus, attacking the mother, since that is its earliest sadistic idea of the act.

¹ Jones, *op. cit.*, pps. 299–300, based on the *Upanishads* and other Vedic literature (Müller).

² Like the “Jesus-Christ” of Zola's *La Terre*: by no means unique.

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Many phobias in neurotics, of thunder as of loud noises and explosions, are found to derive from this association of anal noises with the dreaded father's genital activity. That the orgasm itself, though noiseless, is so frequently symbolised as an explosion doubtless, in part, also derives from the same cause.

This close proximity, in time and place, between the panting respiration of coitus and the flatus which at times accompanies it, serves to displace on the former the libidinal interest originally attached to the latter. Furthermore, the symbolising of male potency as breath would solve many a problem for one who, like Poe, shrank from all that was frankly genital. It would, in effect, enable any reference to male potency to be expressed in seemingly innocent pregenital and even prephallic terms.

Jones has further demonstrated that the crocodile, the very image of impotence in its immobility and mutism, nevertheless, to the Egyptians, became the prime phallic symbol; a symbol as important as the legendary phoenix which, like the penis, is ever reborn from its ashes. Some such process seems to have determined the representing of virility by breath or wind, an essentially anal concept, giving us what we might call an *impotence symbol to symbolise potency*, which apparent contradiction gratifies both the desire to castrate, and to exalt, the father. In such a symbolic process one might, in fact, ignore the penis, for breath takes its place. But, due to the consequent displacement, the omnipotence of the penis is attached to breath. By the blasts of trumpets the walls of Jericho fell—that Jericho, which, like 'Samaria, Nineveh, Troy and Azoth,' at last "opened her gates" after keeping them long closed. Finally, it is the displacement from below above, (a frequent consequence of repression), which so effectively disguises the anal origin of the concept of the generative breath.

If, now, having passed in review the pneuma of the Greeks and the Vedic Prānas, we return from the generative and divine breath of Jehovah to that mislaid by our unfortunate hero, we shall see its anal origin betrayed in numerous details. We content ourselves with mentioning two. For instance, while hunting for his breath in his wife's chamber, Mr. Lacko'-breath imagines it to be found when he overturns a bottle of Oil of Arch-angels—"which agreeable perfume" he, thereupon, permits himself to recommend to the reader. Now, after the word "bottle", Poe originally had a parenthesis, later suppressed, which makes his hero declare: "I had a remarkably sweet breath".¹

As every analyst knows, however, and may frequently verify from the

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, p. 357.

patients he observes, predilections for scent directly derive from anal erotism. The love of *pleasant* smells derives from that of *bad*, which were originally the good smells to the child before education repressed its pleasure in them into its opposite, disgust. This pleasure in these first odoriferous substances survives in animals and, particularly, in the dog, while in many people original traces remain in the predilection for strong cheeses, "high" meat and game. In civilised man, however, this infantile pleasure in smells produced by the bowels is largely transformed into pleasure in scents which, though in supposedly contrary fashion, equally titillate the nasal mucous membranes. The anal origin of this predilection for scents we find further attested in the popular belief that by-products of fæcal matter largely enter into their composition.

The fact that Poe suppressed just this brief sentence which confesses the link between scent and breath, ("I had a remarkably sweet breath"), is of some interest. The phrase itself seems inoffensive and hardly to merit being banned: it, in fact, barely affects the context. But it was doubtless suppressed by Poe because of a vague feeling that it was too open, too offensive an allusion.

Finally, we recall that the guttural and sepulchral utterance, like the croaking of frogs, forced on Mr. Lacko'breath by his accident, reminds us—as we have already said—of borborygms or intestinal noises which are denied issue.

* * *

We left Mr. Lacko'breath on the eve of his flight from home and wife, about to set forth on his travels. Let us follow this "fugue"—for such it was—and so comparable with Poe's own repeated flights from the sex-dangers associated, for him, with women.

"Having at length put my affairs in order," our hero continues,

"I took my seat very early one morning in the mail stage for —, giving it to be understood, among my acquaintances, that business of the last importance required my immediate personal attendance in that city.

"The coach was crammed to repletion; but in the uncertain twilight the features of my companions could not be distinguished. Without making any effectual resistance, I suffered myself to be placed between two gentlemen of colossal dimensions; while a third, of a size larger, requesting pardon for the liberty he was about to take, threw himself upon my body at full length, and falling asleep in an instant, drowned all my guttural ejaculations for relief, in a snore which would have put to blush the roarings of the bull of Phalaris."

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Thus, for the first time in this tale, in flesh and blood, the crushing image of the father appears, depicted as this passenger whose mighty breath at once conjures up the most potent of all animal symbols, the bull, though only in respect of its roars. This ill-mannered fellow, who seems to be travelling on business, to me seems strikingly to suggest John Allan, which appears confirmed by the manner in which he treats his victim. It is as though Poe were here telling us that he himself had been *crushed* by John Allan. "Happily the state of my respiratory faculties rendered suffocation an accident entirely out of the question", which suggests that Poe seems unconsciously to have thought that, by sacrificing his virility, he might preserve his ego intact.

"As, however, the day broke more distinctly in our approach to the outskirts of the city, my tormentor arising and adjusting his shirt-collar, thanked me in a very friendly manner for my civility. Seeing that I remained motionless, (all my limbs were dislocated and my head twisted on one side,) his apprehensions began to be excited; and arousing the rest of the passengers, he communicated in a very decided manner, his opinion that a dead man had been palmed upon them during the night for a living and responsible fellow-traveller; here giving me a thump on the right eye, by way of demonstrating the truth of his suggestion."

This eye-motif we have met before, first in *The Gold-Bug* and, again, as our tale begins, when Mr. Lacko'breath finds a glass eye in his wife's drawer, together with false teeth and a pair of false hips. It represents symbolic castration and will find its completest expression in the gouged-out eye of the *Black Cat*. The thump on Mr. Lacko'breath's right eye, however, forms but the introduction to the multiple symbolic castrations that follow. For, when the other passengers, a mystic nine, have one by one "pulled his ear", a doctor among them eventually declares him dead after establishing that he lacks even breath to tarnish a mirror. Thereupon, with one accord, the passengers cast his "carcass" into the road.

"I was . . . thrown out at the sign of the 'Crow', (by which tavern the coach happened to be passing,)" continues our hero, "without meeting with any farther accident than the breaking of both my arms, under the left hind wheel of the vehicle. I must besides do the driver the justice to state that he did not forget to throw after me the largest of my trunks, which, unfortunately falling on my head, fractured my skull in a manner at once interesting and extraordinary."

Now another father-figure appears, to emphasize the castration motif

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still more clearly. For, when the landlord of the "Crow" has found enough in the trunk to reward his efforts, he sends for a surgeon to whom he delivers our hero, with fractured head and arms, against a receipt for ten dollars.

Follows a description of the surgeon's aid:

"The purchaser took me to his apartment and commenced operations immediately. Having cut off my ears, however, he discovered signs of animation. He now rang the bell, and sent for a neighboring apothecary with whom to consult in the emergency. In case of his suspicions with regard to my existence proving ultimately correct, he, in the meantime, made an incision in my stomach, and removed several of my viscera for private dissection."

Symbolic castration could hardly go further. Nevertheless, our hero remains alive, although the apothecary pronounces him dead, for the victim's kicks and plunges, to prove his existence, are taken as a mere reflex to the apothecary's galvanic shocks. It is as though we were already viewing Mr. Valdemar's convulsions, and even his sepulchral tones are anticipated in Mr. Lacko'breath's guttural voice. But now, doubtless from the shock of these multiple castrations, he loses such voice as he had, and cannot even make himself heard.

As a result, the "practitioners", unable to reach a decision, remand their victim "for further examination". The surgeon's lady provides him with "drawers and stockings" and the surgeon, himself, gags and binds and bolts him in a garret, abandoned "to silence and to meditation".

The unfortunate hero now discovers that, but for the handkerchief binding his jaws, he could resume his guttural speech. Delighted by this discovery, he mentally begins to repeat "passages of the 'Omnipresence of the Deity'" (in other words, of the father whom, indeed, he meets at every turn; in the bulky passenger, in the castrating surgeon and in others, as we shall see). At this point,

"two cats, of a greedy and vituperative turn, entering at a hole in the wall, leaped up with a flourish *à la Catalani*, and alighting opposite one another on my visage, betook themselves to indecorous contention for the paltry consideration of my nose.

"But, as the loss of his ears proved the means of elevating to the throne of Cyrus, the Magian or Mige-Gush of Persia, and as the cutting off his nose gave Zopyrus possession of Babylon, so the loss of a few ounces of my countenance proved the salvation of my body."

So, too, the children of races which practise circumcision buy salvation of

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the rest of their beings. Why this operation is here entrusted to *cats*, we shall see later, when we come to consider the story *The Black Cat*.

"Aroused by the pain, and burning with indignation," Mr. Lacko'breath bursts his bonds and, throwing open the window—to the "extreme horror and disappointment" of the belligerents,—precipitates himself "very dexterously" into the street below.

Leaving for the moment the two cats, and what they may represent, let us follow our hero where his amazing destiny leads him.

"The mail-robber W——, to whom I bore a singular resemblance, was at this moment passing from the city jail to the scaffold erected for his execution in the suburbs. His extreme infirmity, and long continued ill health, had obtained him the privilege of remaining unmanacled; and habited in his gallows' costume—one very similar to my own—he lay at full length in the bottom of the hangman's cart (which happened to be under the windows of the surgeon at the moment of my precipitation) without any other guard than the driver who was asleep, and two recruits of the sixth infantry, who were drunk.

"As ill-luck would have it, I alit upon my feet within the vehicle. W——, who was an acute fellow, perceived his opportunity."

He leaps from the cart and, in a twinkling, disappears. The drunken recruits are somewhat muddled as to what has taken place but, seeing a man very similar to W— on his feet, in the cart, they conclude that their captive is attempting to escape and, after another dram apiece, fell the poor wretch with the butts of their muskets.

Mr. Lacko'breath is thus turned over to the hangman, who slips the noose on his neck and lets fall the drop.

In the first version of this story the hanged man's sensations were now described in detail.¹ The following long and interesting passage is suppressed in the final *Broadway Journal* version and in Griswold.

"Die I certainly did not", it begins.

"The sudden jerk given to my neck upon the falling of the drop, merely proved a corrective to the unfortunate twist afforded me by the gentlemen in the coach. Although my body certainly *was*, I had, alas! no breath *to be* suspended; and but for the shaking of the rope, the pressure of the knot under my ear, and the rapid determination of blood to the brain, should, I dare say, have experienced very little inconvenience.

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 2, pp. 357–364.

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"The latter feeling, however, grew momentarily more painful. I heard my heart beating with violence—the veins in my hands and wrists swelled nearly to bursting—my temples throbbed tempestuously—and I felt that my eyes were starting from their sockets. Yet when I say that in spite of all this my sensations were not absolutely intolerable, I will not be believed."

Mr. Lacko'breath then describes the strange noises in his ears—bells toll, drums beat, and he hears the murmur of the sea. At the same time, his mental powers are strangely affected and permit him to analyse even his confused state, with paradoxical clarity and precision.

"Memory, which, of all other faculties, should have first taken its departure, seemed on the contrary to have been endowed with quadrupled power. Each incident of my past life flitted before me like a shadow. There was not a brick in the building where I was born—not a dog-leaf in the primer I had thumbed over when a child—not a tree in the forest where I hunted when a boy—not a street in the cities I had traversed when a man—that I did not at that time most palpably behold. I could repeat to myself entire lines, passages, chapters, books, from the studies of my earliest days; and while, I dare say, the crowd around me were blind with horror, or aghast with awe, I was alternately with Æschylus, a demi-god, or with Aristophanes, a frog."

Where had Poe learnt to describe such sensations? After a significant row of asterisks, he himself answers this question:

"A dreamy delight now took hold upon my spirit, and I imagined that I had been eating opium, or feasting upon the Hashish of the old Assassins".

In these words Poe indirectly confesses his use of the drug, as much betrayed by Mr. Lacko'breath's phantasies and sensations as by those of the traveller in *The Oval Portrait*, or Monos relating his experiences after death to Una.¹

This drug, by the fevered visions it inspires, and the utter immobility it imposes, is admirably fitted to conjure up the phantasies of Life in Death that haunted Poe's unconscious. Now the hanged man experiences its effects: he has glimpses of "pure unadulterated reason" and blesses his stars as he looks out over the sea of waving heads round him.

"In the intensity of my delight I eyed them with feelings of the

¹ *The Colloquy of Monos and Una: Graham's Magazine*, August 1841; 1845

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deepest commiseration, and blessed, as I looked upon the haggard assembly, the superior benignity of *my* proper stars”.

Meanwhile he continues to reason, in a sort of intoxication, on the most abstruse and varied metaphysical subjects, which include Coleridge, Kant, Fichte and Pantheism.

Here more asterisks herald a peak in his toxic delirium.

“A rapid change was now taking place in my sensations. The last shadows of connection flitted away from my meditations. A storm—a tempest of ideas, vast, novel, and soul-stirring, bore my spirit like a feather afar off. Confusion crowded upon confusion like a wave upon a wave.”

Whereupon Mr. Lacko’breath is shortly removed from the gallows. In his confusion he hardly knows what has happened, though he feels the concussion of his fall. It then appears that the real culprit has been caught, though somewhat late. Our hero, still alive, now seems quite dead and since none claims his body, it is decided he be given a common burial next morning. Meanwhile, the suppositious corpse is laid out in a room, described as follows:—

“I was laid out in a chamber sufficiently small, and very much encumbered with furniture—yet to me it appeared of a size to contain the universe. I have never before or since, in body or in mind, suffered half so much agony as from that single idea. Strange! that the simple conception of abstract magnitude—of infinity—should have been accompanied with pain. Yet so it was. ‘With how vast a difference,’ said I, ‘in life as in death—in time and in eternity—here and hereafter, shall our merest sensations be embodied!’ ”

Thus Mr. Lacko’breath relates the approach of death to the loss of the sense of time and space experienced in opium dreams for, despite having lost his breath and most of his viscera he still, and with reason, refuses to believe himself dead.

“The day died away, and I was aware that it was growing dark—yet the same terrible conceit still overwhelmed me. Nor was it confined to the boundaries of the apartment—it extended, although in a more definite manner, to all objects, and, perhaps, I will not be understood in saying that it extended also to all *sentiments*. My fingers as they lay cold, clammy, stiff, and pressing helplessly one against another, were, in my imagination, swelled to a size according with the proportions of the Antæus. Every portion of my frame betook of their enormity. The pieces of money—I well remember—which,

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being placed upon my eyelids, failed to keep them effectually closed, seemed huge, interminable chariot-wheels of the Olympia, or of the Sun.

"Yet it is very singular that I experienced no sense of weight—of gravity. On the contrary I was put to much inconvenience by the buoyancy—that tantalizing *difficulty of keeping down*, which is felt by the swimmer in deep water, Amid the tumult of my terrors I laughed with a hearty internal laugh to think what incongruity there would be—could I arise and walk—between the elasticity of my motion, and the mountain of my form."

This loss of sense of weight is also characteristic of the opium dream. Here we find it associated with the strange sensation of swelling, which, as we shall later see, derives from another and different source.

* * *

Abandoning Mr. Lacko'breath, for the moment, to the torments and delights of his opium dream, we are now justified, as psycho-analysts, in asking why Poe should have elected that his burlesque hero be hanged and why, in place of resultant death, an opium dream should be substituted. If questions such as these seem idle to the reader, if to them these episodes are but the vagaries of a writer, they grossly underrate, as do so many, the power and extent of that deep psychic determinism which penetrates even the unconscious.

Hanging, it would appear, in all ages and climes, enjoys the same reputation of, so it is said, producing erection and ejaculation *in extremis*.¹ Whence,

¹ Doubtless, in part, this belief derives from the fact that, as suicide-statistics show, suicides by hanging (always a numerous class) are almost invariably men. In France especially, during the last thirty years, suicide by hanging represents 30 to 40 per cent. of all suicides and includes practically no women. (From figures communicated by Prof. René Piédelièvre in 1933.) (See also Balthazard, *Précis de Médecine légale*, Paris, Baillière, 1928, p. 185.)

As to whether or no hanging really produces erection and ejaculation *in extremis*, L. Thoinot, in his *Précis de Médecine légale* (Paris, Octave Doin et fils, 1913) writes as follows (Vol. I, pp. 638-639):

"A very disputed problem in the past concerns *erection and ejaculation* during hanging.

"In most cases semen is found in the urethra of men hanged and, often, spots of semen on the clothing.

"Is this presence of semen a common phenomenon of death equally observed in the hanged as in all corpses, owing to the relaxation of the sphincter muscles, or does it result from a vital activity: true erection and ejaculation?

"Guyon, a French naval doctor who, in 1822, witnessed the hanging of

doubtless, the traditional association of the mandrake root, vaguely human in form and once so widely employed in magic, with the gallows. Even to-day, it is said, there are old men who resort to incomplete forms of hanging in hopes of increasing their erectile powers. And it is just when our hero has undergone his numerous visceral symbolic castrations at the surgeon's hands, that Poe's unconscious, as it were, protests and avenges itself by thus attaching a new penis to our hero. It is as though he here said: "No, I am not castrated; I still have my penis, as you very well see", as

fourteen negroes, observed concurrently with strangulation, powerful erections in all: an hour later, in nine corpses, the member was semi-erect and the urethra full of seminal fluid. This semen was therefore produced by a real ejaculation (after Brouardel).

"Guyon's story was considered a fable. Devergie was almost the only nineteenth-century writer to accept erection and ejaculation occurring in the hanged.

"Orfila found that when corpses were suspended even three or four hours after death, marked congestion of the genital organs occurred with descent of spermatozoa into the urethra.

"Tardieu, in a lively controversy with Davergie on this point, maintained that seminal fluid in the urethra resulted from mechanical causes due to the body's position.

"Pellereau, in Mauritius, with ample opportunities to witness hangings, never observed actual ejaculation in any criminals he saw hanged.

"The classic German writers, Casper, Maschka and Hofmann also opposed the idea that ejaculation precedes death in the hanged. As a result, the belief arose, now universally adopted, that the presence of semen in the urethra of the hanged has neither more nor less significance than in other corpses.

"To-day it would seem necessary somewhat to modify this extreme view and admit that, in certain cases, exceptional no doubt but authenticated, erection and true ejaculation do take place during hanging."

Feld, Ebertz, Pellier, Baslini, Caprara, Ziemke, Hansen, Puppe and Götz are all then cited as having observed erection and even ejaculation in the hanged.

Whether, however, erection and/or ejaculation take place, any accompanying pleasurable sensations must be extremely slight, since all the accounts of those cut down agree that after a first phase in which there is "a feeling of warmth in the head and a ringing and whistling in the ears, with sensations of bright light, sparks, flashes, etc. . . .", the legs grow heavy, all feeling disappears and loss of consciousness ensues, painlessly and without any feeling of suffocation. (l.c., p. 637.)

It is only later that the convulsions occur which habitually precede the death of the hanged.

Nevertheless, the reality of these facts has no bearing on the universal symbolism of hanging. The psycho-analyst may indeed ask whether this very divergence of opinion as to erection and ejaculation in the hanged may not, more or less, be due to the degree to which its symbolism, with which we shall now deal, is repressed in the observer.

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the onlooking multitude gazes astounded at the figure on the scaffold. But how sardonically this restitution is made! For though our hero feels himself "with Æschylus, a demi-god", and regards the crowd at his feet with "the deepest commiseration" while blessing the "superior benignity" of his fate, nevertheless, he himself, is there hanging. Even the penis, so mock-heroically restored, with which he thus identifies himself with all his body,¹ is itself no better than a man hanged, in its flaccidity and limpness. Here too, then, as with wind and breath, we find an impotency symbol symbolising potency.

The hanged man also reacts to his "rephallisation" in a similar manner. He feels voluptuous pleasure, it is true, but it is the "chemo-toxic orgasm"² of opium, in which the libido, as it were, short circuits itself inside the body, owing to inability to reach out to an external love object. The opium delirium, as that from all toxic substances, serves as a substitute for the masturbatory orgasm, a form of satisfaction derived from regression to the primal pregenital oral-erotic phase from which even trace of the child's penis-masturbation has vanished.

Glimpses of this past activity, however, appear in our hero's opium dream when he hangs, and after he is cut down. Yet, even as signs of this activity begin to work through into the preconscious, they are immediately charged with intense anxiety—that anxiety which, when he was a child,

¹ I owe to Freud this observation on the phallic meaning of the bodies of the hanged. I shall revert to it in discussing *The Black Cat* (Cf. pages 469-472).

² Cf. Sándor Rado, *The Psychic Effects of Intoxicants: An Attempt to Evolve a Psycho-Analytical Theory of Morbid Cravings* (*International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. VII, pp. 396-413), translated from *Die psychischen Wirkungen des Rauschgiftes. Versuch eines psychoanalytischen Theorie des Suchte*, *Int. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, XII, 1926, heft. 3. Rado's argument may be summarised as follows: The orgasm is characterised by its extension to the whole body and the general discharge of excitation which it affords. This is true of the orgasm of pharmacological origin, as of the genital orgasm, although in the former the discharge is non-explosive in character and, as it were, in slow motion. The original form of this orgasm, which is always oral in origin, would be the "alimentary orgasm" of the nursing, a feeling of euphoria and general relief from tension experienced during the ingestion and digestion of food, which constitute the nursing's intensest sensations at this oral phase. The drug addict regresses to this primitive oral phase to which he has remained fixated, losing his genitality in the process and gradually withdrawing his libidinal attachments from all external objects. Finally, his libido becomes entirely concentrated on the poison which brings him pleasure, this obtaining of the drug constituting his only aim in life, in the same way that the absorption of milk and the subsequent alimentary orgasm, form the sole vital objective of the nursing.

must have caused its own repression and thus doomed Poe to life-long impotence.

What are Mr. Lacko'breath's sensations at the moment he is hanged, that is, when his penis is thus restored?

"I heard my heart beating with violence—the veins in my hands and wrists swelled nearly to bursting—my temples throbbed tempestuously—and I felt that my eyes were starting from their sockets."

Thus, once more, we find an unconscious allusion to erection, in the form of an influx of blood into the bulbo-cavernous tissues. By a reversal of affect, however—a classic mechanism in neurotics—the sensation of swelling, as a result of repression, grows "momentarily more painful" and transforms the pleasure into anxiety.

Even more transparent is the allusion to erection in the victim's illusions after he is hanged, for the fingers, instrumental in masturbation, by a similar customary transference from penis to hand, swell "to a size according with the proportions of the Antæus", that giant whose strength was drawn from contact with the Earth, his mother. So, too, with the rest of our hero's body. Such sensations remind one of certain nightmares. In one case I know, a little girl, later analysed, suffered from a recurrent nightmare which she called the *screw dream*. She felt she was lying in bed, on her back and that, from her abdomen, perpendicularly, in the prevailing and sinister gloom, a huge wooden screw rose to the ceiling. The screw, all slimy with glue, went on revolving slowly and, as the child held the screw with her hands, they would begin to swell, as in this story, until they filled the whole room, whereupon the child awoke in a state of indescribable anxiety. Later analysis enabled this nightmare to be recognised as a substitute for infantile masturbation, once the child had been broken of the habit by violence and menaces that she would die. It was a dream of clitoris erection, accompanied by penis envy and genital pleasure, converted into anxiety. The "glue" represented both the moisture of the genital mucosæ, and the real glue on fly-papers hung from the ceiling. The child had felt sorry for the poor captured flies which died after touching the forbidden (taboo) glue. Such was the final fate of people who loved *vice*¹ and dared to induce their hands to swell, as substitutes for another part of the body.

The feeling of flying, of being released from the laws of gravity, which is characteristic not only of opium dreams, but of dreams which represent

¹ The little girl was French and, in French, the word *vis*, meaning screw, is pronounced like the word *vice*.

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erection, where gravity is also overcome, need not, necessarily, have occurred in this nightmare, the erection itself being represented in a form thinly disguised. In his delirium, however, Mr. Lacko'breath resorts to it in the usual way, and is much inconvenienced by "the buoyancy—that tantalising *difficulty in keeping down* which is felt by the swimmer in deep water". From which we gather that erectility must have seemed a veritable torment to the profoundly inhibited, impotent Poe. The urge towards supremest pleasure had become the source of supreme anxiety. Thus, he preferred the intoxications induced by alcohol and, especially, opium—which do not importune the penis—that he might remain

"alive with the attributes of the dead and dead, with the propensities of the living . . . very calm, yet breathless".

The rapid decline in virility, and loss of erectility, in opium-addicts, is well known.

Here we touch on a biological problem of some difficulty, especially after the lapse of more than a century. What form did Poe's impotence take? Was it a psychic impotence that made the sex act impossible, owing to the dangers the approach to women implied—although erection might occur when he was away from them—or did erectility vanish at an early age?

I incline to the view that it was the latter more total form of impotence. If as appears, Poe, when 22, *i.e.*, in 1831 and at Baltimore, began to resort, probably intermittently, to opium, it was no doubt because of the inner prohibition which banned erection. The protracted, undifferentiated, sensuous delights which opium induces, a pleasure comparable with that of the torpid, replete babe, would suit a necrophilist psyche, like Poe's, far better than the doing of horrible acts, the very idea of which would strike him as repellant. Yet he could indulge these ideas in his contemplative, gruesome and æsthetic reveries, without fear of remorse.

Unlike the depleted Mr. Lacko'breath of this story, it is only in fiction that a hero, as in Poe's *Lionizing*,¹ can pride himself on a huge nose—substitute for the penis—as the cause of his social success. Yet, at the end of the tale, we find that his triumphs are eclipsed by the Elector of Bluddennuff, from whom, in a duel, he shoots off that same appendage. For, as we have pointed out, the impotent often end, however they may suffer, by priding themselves on that very impotence, and considering it a mark of distinction which puts them above the common run. Though

¹ *Some Passages in the Life of a Lion (Lionizing)*; *Southern Literary Messenger*, May 1835; 1840; 1845; *Broadway Journal*, I, 11.

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"in Fum-Fudge the greatness of a lion is in proportion to the size of his proboscis . . . there is no competing with a lion who has no proboscis at all".

But let us return to Mr. Lacko'breath, as he lies in the chamber so strangely encumbered with furniture and waits to be buried. He has spent all night meditating on his imminent death, in a state which he pictures as "motionless, yet wishing for motion—powerless, yet longing for power". Now morning arrives and, with the "misty and gloomy dawn" there comes "in triple horror the paraphernalia of the grave". Though still unable to move or speak, through half-closed lids he sees the coffin appear, as also the undertaker "with attendants and a screw-driver". Again a "stout" man appears, who grasps his feet, while another, out of sight, takes his head and shoulders.

"Together they placed me in the coffin, and drawing the shroud up over my face proceeded to fasten down the lid. One of the screws, missing its proper direction, was screwed by the carelessness of the undertaker deep—deep—down into my shoulder. A convulsive shudder ran throughout my frame. With what horror, with what sickening of heart did I reflect that one minute sooner a similar manifestation of life would, in all probability, have prevented my inhumation. But alas! it was now too late, and hope died away within my bosom as I felt myself lifted upon the shoulders of men—carried down the stairway—and thrust within the hearse.

"During the brief passage to the cemetery my sensations, which for some time had been lethargic and dull, assumed, all at once, a degree of intense and unnatural vivacity for which I can in no manner account. I could distinctly hear the rustling of the plumes—the whispers of the attendants—the solemn breathings of the horses of death. Confused as I was in that narrow and strict embrace, I could feel the quicker or slower movement of the procession—the restlessness of the driver—the windings of the road as it led us to the right or to the left. I could distinguish the peculiar odor of the coffin—the sharp acid smell of the steel screws. I could see the texture of the shroud as it lay close against my face; and was even conscious of the rapid variations in light and shade which the flapping to and fro of the sable hangings occasioned within the body of the vehicle."

Thus our poor friend, with his "X-ray" eyes, even pierces through the boards of his coffin. Yet, would there not be a memory here, or phantasy rather, transferred to other hearses, from some phantasy of having seen that of his mother? For a child looking on *could* have seen the hearse, even

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if the man in the coffin could not. Thus, the strange pomp of the hanged man's funeral, the mourners and plumes and procession through the city would be explained for, in his unconscious it is, in fact, the hearse of Poe's mother that is here represented which, doubtless, was followed by admirers and fellow-actors. In the same way, may not the small furniture-encumbered room where, to our surprise, the hanged man waits to be buried, be some reminiscence of the room in which the small Edgar first met death: the humble "furnished room" rented from Mrs. Phillips, the milliner, where Elizabeth Arnold pined and died?

Be that as it may, the room, the coffin and, then, the hearse, all subserve an unconscious design in this story, by representing the places where our hero enacts each stage of *regression*, beginning with the "opium dream" which accompanies and follows his hanging. This dream replaces the pangs of death; the death which should have ensued being equated, in the unconscious, with a return to the womb. Given that the opium dream reproduces and augments the voluptuous pleasure of the satisfied babe, Mr. Lacko'breath, starting from the oral-erotic stage, regresses ever backwards into the past. In this over-furnished room, doubtless reminiscent of the chance lodging in which Poe's mother died, the hero, entering his coffin, symbolically returns to the mother's womb. Then it is that the ubiquitous Father, like the God he is, now shown as an undertaker, pursues him to this final refuge and pierces his shoulder with a screw whose symbolic significance every analyst will understand. The screw, in the dream of the child we quoted earlier, had a similar phallic meaning; *screwing*, in vulgar parlance, denoting the sex act. There is here, too, an allusion to one of those unconscious phantasies which seem so strange to the layman; that of intra-uterine observation of coitus. We shall meet this phantasy again in its most transparent and most terrible form, in another famous tale by Poe which we shall analyse in due course.

Thus, restored to life by a penetrating screw, Mr. Lacko'breath, in his coffin, is "lifted upon the shoulders of men", carried down the stairway—"and thrust within the hearse". Now, if the coffin represents the mother's womb, the hearse, following the common infantile symbolism attached to vehicles, would represent her whole body. The pregnant uterus, *i.e.*, the coffin with its contents, is thus borne along in the hearse, by "horses of death", whose "solemn breathings" he hears. In the same way, the little Edgar, then Rosalie, were "carried" by a mother, breathless, consumptive and bearing the stigma of death. In that "narrow and strict" placental embrace, the sensations of the foetus, nurtured by its mother's blood, suddenly and inexplicably assume an "intense and unnatural vivacity". So,

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too, might Poe's unconscious have pictured the vitality of the foetus towards the end of its intra-uterine existence when, fully grown and rocked by the ponderous movements of its mother, it begins to move and demonstrate its existence. But this regression into the pre-natal past extends yet further. Before this activity began there was a time when the foetus experienced an utter immobility, a timeless sleep in the womb. So, too, our hero's coffin, when it reaches its place of sepulture, is laid in its grave in the earth's bowels, which then close on their tenant.

"From what I overheard early in the morning . . . it was probable that many months might elapse before the doors of the tomb would be again unbarred—and even should I survive until that period, what means could I have more than at present, of making known my situation or of escaping from the coffin? I resigned myself, therefore, with much tranquility to my fate, and fell, after many hours, into a deep and deathlike sleep."

The original limbo of pre-natal existence being reached, regression can go no further.

"How long I remained thus" (in this pre-natal sleep) "is to me a mystery. When I awoke my limbs were no longer cramped with the cramp of death—I was no longer without the power of motion. A very slight exertion was sufficient to force the lid of my prison—for the dampness of the atmosphere had already occasioned decay in the wood-work around the screws."

He now, therefore, emerges from his womb-like coffin and essays his first feeble, timid steps, with all the hesitation we might expect in one so newly born. Also, like a new-born child, he begins to feel the gnawing of hunger—and, above all, an "intolerable thirst". "Yet, as time passed away," he says,

"it is strange that I experienced little uneasiness from these scourges of the earth, in comparison with the more terrible visitations of the fiend, *Ennui*. Stranger still were the resources by which I endeavoured to banish him from my presence."

For now he begins to speculate on the construction and dimensions of the many-dungeoned supulchre in which he is imprisoned, and counts and recounts its stones, as though afflicted with arithmomania.

"But there were other methods by which I endeavored to lighten the tedium of my hours. Feeling my way among the numerous coffins ranged in order around, I lifted them down one by one, and breaking

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open their lids, busied myself in speculations about the mortality within."

We now return to the final version of this tale, in which Poe suppressed all our quotations from the time Mr. Lacko'breath is hanged to the point we have reached. And here, we will again note that in waking-phantasies, as in dreams, the elements which are forgotten, or what amounts to the same thing, suppressed, are the most relevatory of the unconscious meaning of the whole.

Mr. Lacko'breath, then, in his tedium, has just removed the lid from a coffin. " 'This!' he soliloquizes,

"tumbling over a carcass, puffy, bloated, and rotund—'this has been, no doubt, in every sense of the word, an unhappy—an unfortunate man. It has been his terrible lot not to walk, but to waddle—to pass through life not like a human being, but like an elephant—not like a man, but like a rhinoceros.

" 'His attempts at getting on have been mere abortions, and his circumgyratory proceedings a palpable failure. Taking a step forward, it has been his misfortune to take two towards the right, and three towards the left. His studies have been confined to the poetry of Crabbe. He can have had no idea of the wonder of a *pirouette*. To him a *pas de papillon* has been an abstract conception. He has never ascended the summit of a hill. He has never viewed from any steeple the glories of a metropolis. Heat has been his mortal enemy. In the dog-days his days have been the days of a dog. Therein, he has dreamed of flames and suffocation—of mountains upon mountains—of Pelion upon Ossa. He was short of breath—to say all in a word, he was short of breath. He thought it extravagant to play upon wind instruments. He was the inventor of self-moving fans, wind-sails, and ventilators. He patronized Du Pont the bellows-maker, and died miserably in attempting to smoke a cigar. His was a case in which I feel a deep interest—a lot in which I sincerely sympathize! "

In our opinion, there is more in this "puffy, bloated, and rotund" carcase which Mr. Lacko'breath thus disinters, than the mere reflection of his luckless self. Indeed, it reminds us of other figures in his tales. The swollen corpse of Rogers in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, for instance, and the obese Queen Consort of *King Pest*, whom he likens to a beer-keg, and who is "in the last stage of a dropsy". In Poe, the lover of ethereal, of consumptive fragility in women, excess of *embonpoint* always gave rise to especial derision. In *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of*

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Sheherazade,¹ for example, he expresses horror at the then fashionable bustle, which made a "dromedary" of a woman. If all these general indications are put together and considered analytically, we are struck by a new idea. In *King Pest*, we see the royal pair as an obese queen and an extraordinarily tall and emaciated king. Similarly, in *Loss of Breath*, we may anticipate somewhat by disclosing that the next coffin will yield a tall, emaciated corpse, to partner the bloated corpse already revealed. Furthermore, we are told to satiety, even, that this carcase cannot dance; not for it the *pirouette* or *pas de papillon*! Can we not, then, in the reference to this bloated carcase, see here a revenge taken by Poe on his mother, for being so wicked as to produce a sister-rival when he was a child? During her pregnancy, the once fragile, applauded sylph, would doubtless have been forced to abandon dancing and ponderous, "short of breath" . . . "bloated and rotund", to remain at home with her son. Later, her movements about the room would remind him of a duck's "waddle", and her shape of an "elephant" or "rhinoceros". She, too, at night, would have dreamt she was suffocating, of "mountains upon mountains", and her "circumgyratory proceedings", had she wished to dance, would have ended in "palpable failure" and possibly, even, in miscarriage.

The fact that the mother is here represented by someone of the male sex, need not trouble us greatly. When Elizabeth Arnold was pregnant with Rosalie, Edgar, then under two, was still too small to appreciate any difference in the sexes. His mother, for him, still possessed a penis, and a carry-over from this time may, possibly, be detected in the fact that, in his tales, Poe indifferently embodies his vision of the pregnant mother as the bloated corpse of a woman, (*King Pest*), or as those of men. (*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Loss of Breath*).

Nevertheless, it is not only the mother whom the tomb is to deliver up to our hero, thus reborn, but those responsible for the phenomenon of birth; the life-giving couple. Turning, therefore, from the bloated, rotund corpse, our hero passes to another:

"'But here,' said I, 'here'—and I dragged spitefully from its receptacle a gaunt, tall, and peculiar-looking form, whose remarkable appearance struck me with a sense of unwelcome familiarity—'here is a wretch entitled to no earthly commiseration'. Thus saying, in order to obtain a more distinct view of my subject, I applied my thumb and fore-finger to its nose, and causing it to assume a sitting position

¹ *The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Sheherazade: Godey's Lady's Book*, February 1845; *Broadway Journal*, II, 16.

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upon the ground, held it thus, at the length of my arm, while I continued my soliloquy.

—"Entitled," I repeated, 'to no earthly commiseration. Who indeed would think of compassionating a shadow? Besides, has he not had his full share of the blessings of mortality? He was the originator of tall monuments—shot-towers—lightning-rods—lombardy poplars. His treatise upon "Shades and Shadows" has immortalized him. He edited with distinguished ability the last edition of "South on the Bones".¹ He went early to college and studied pneumatics. He then came home, talked eternally, and played upon the French-horn. He patronized the bag-pipes. Captain Barclay, who walked against Time, would not walk against *him*. Windham² and Allbreath were his favorite writers—his favorite artist, Phiz.³ He died gloriously while inhaling gas—*levique flatu corrumpitur*, like the *fama pudicitiae* in Hieronymus. He was indubitably a—."

But here, Mr. Windenough—for he it is whom Lacko'breath thus holds by the nose—tears the bands from his jaws and hurls forth a spate of words. He complains that his jaws have been tied, for

"'you *must* know—if you know anything—how vast a superfluity of breath I have to dispose of! . . . In my situation it is really a great relief to be able to open one's mouth. . . How the devil, sir, did you get into this place?—not a word I beseech you—been here some time myself—terrible accident!—heard of it, I suppose—awful calamity!—walking under your windows—some short while ago—about the time you were stage-struck—horrible occurrence!—heard of "catching one's breath", eh?—hold your tongue I tell you!—I caught somebody else's!—had always too much of my own—met Blab at the corner of the street—wouldn't give me a chance for a word—couldn't get in a syllable edgeways—attacked, consequently, with epilepsy—Blab made his escape—damn all fools!—they took me up for dead, and put me in this place. . . .'"

Thus all is explained and Mr. Lacko'breath at last knows what became of his breath.

"It is impossible", he says, "to conceive . . . the joy with which I became gradually convinced that the breath so fortunately caught by

¹ John F. South (1797–1882). *Short Description of the Bones* (1st Edition, 1825).

² William Windham (1750–1810). English orator and statesman. I have been unable to identify Allbreath.

³ Phiz: pseudonym of Hablot Knight Browne (1815–1882), illustrator of Dickens, and occasionally of *Punch*.

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the gentleman (whom I soon recognized as my neighbour Windenough) was, in fact, the identical expiration mislaid by myself in the conversation with my wife.

Mr. Lacko'breath, however, is prudent and circumspect, not to say cunning, and therefore carefully conceals his design from his adversary, for

"in displaying anxiety for the breath of which he was at present so anxious to get rid, might I not lay myself open to the exactions of his avarice?"

—in other words, blackmail! Accordingly, still grasping his enemy's nose, he cries,

" 'Monster! . . . and double-winded idiot!—dost *thou*, whom for thine iniquities, it has pleased heaven to accurse with a two-fold respiration—dost *thou*, I say, presume to address me in the familiar language of an old acquaintance?—"I lie", forsooth! and "hold my tongue", to be sure!—pretty conversation indeed, to a gentleman with a single breath!—all this, too, when I have it in my power to relieve the calamity under which thou dost so justly suffer—to curtail the superfluities of thine unhappy respiration.' "

Lacko'breath's tactics succeed. Windenough capitulates without even asking how our hero, who has not revealed his infirmity, proposes to help.

"Preliminaries being at length arranged, my acquaintance delivered me the respiration; for which (having carefully examined it) I gave him afterwards a receipt.

"I am aware that by many I shall be held to blame for speaking, in a manner so cursory, of a transaction so impalpable. It will be thought that I should have entered more minutely into the details of an occurrence by which—and this is very true—much new light might be thrown upon a highly interesting branch of physical philosophy.

"To all this I am sorry that I cannot reply. A hint is the only answer which I am permitted to make. There were *circumstances*—but I think it much safer upon consideration to say as little as possible about an affair so delicate—*so delicate*, I repeat, and at the time involving the interests of a third party whose sulphurous resentment I have not the least desire, at this moment, of incurring."

Though we are not told the identity of this third party, the Devil is clearly designed, that classic representative of the wicked Father and, here, Mr. Windenough's double. As to the "delicacy" of the transaction, a transaction involving a branch of "physical philosophy", this is too obvious to need comment.

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We then learn how the two characters, who thus restore each other to normality, escape from their tomb.

"The united strength of our resuscitated voices was soon sufficiently apparent. Scissors, the Whig Editor, republished a treatise upon 'the nature and origin of subterranean noises' ". . .

(so that, again, voice is equated with flatus). The opening of the vault, and the discovery of the two men, brings the tale to an end.

Mr. Lacko'breath concludes by directing the readers' attention to

"the merits of that indiscriminate philosophy which is a sure and ready shield against those shafts of calamity which can neither be seen, felt, nor fully understood. It was in the spirit of this wisdom that, among the Ancient Hebrews, it was believed the gates of Heaven", like the besieged cities which symbolised women in the preamble, "would be inevitably opened to that sinner, or saint, who, with good lungs and implicit confidence, should vociferate the word '*Amen!*' It was in the spirit of this wisdom that, when a great plague raged at Athens, and every means had been in vain attempted for its removal, Epimenides . . . advised the erection of a shrine and temple 'to the proper God'."

The "proper" God is here, doubtless, the real father; he to whose erection the child was, in fact, due, whatever might be its legitimacy. Can Poe, in his unconscious, have doubted not only Rosalie's but his own legitimacy? We shall never know. But we are here brought back to the first tragedy of his childhood, the protagonists then being his legitimate parents and, possibly, another male; a tragedy whose shadows are thrown on the walls of the tomb in which Lacko'breath and Windenough at last meet.

Perhaps it is not only because he has robbed his less fortunate rival, that Mr. Windenough has double breath. May we not here have an unconscious memory of the little Edgar seeing his mother in the possession of two men? Even if we omit this hypothetical lover, there was surely a time when Edgar knew that before becoming Mrs. Poe, his mother was Mrs. Hopkins. A further and unmistakable clue to such a memory seems to have crept into this tale for, in fact, it is the morning after his marriage that Lacko'breath discovers a whole packet of love-letters from Windenough, his neighbour, to his wife. These letters, then, could only have been written, sent and received, before the marriage. Elizabeth Arnold's son knew his mother to have been another man's wife before her remarriage. Indeed, the event took place in a "surprisingly short time",¹ for it was only

¹ *Israel*, p. 10. Three months, according to Woodberry (I, p. 9).

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three months after Hopkins' death that she married David Poe, a fellow-actor.

Thus, vestiges of real memories seem to have crept into this tale from all directions, their autobiographical nature being further confirmed by the fact that Poe, for some unknown reason, as though in disclaim, signed it *Lyttleton Barry*.

* * *

All in all, this story, *Loss of Breath*, might be summed up thus: a man loses his breath, the morning after his marriage, for trying to shout too loudly into his wife's ear. The lost breath is caught by his neighbour, Windenough, who happens to pass by. Mrs. Lacko'breath already loves the latter, before this accident, because of his mighty breath, and now we see him doubly endowed. Nevertheless, Lacko'breath, after various mishaps, such as being crushed in a coach by a huge fellow passenger, dissection by a surgeon, and hanging by an executioner, rediscovers his luckier rival in the tomb, harassed by his theft, and his double endowment of breath. Whereupon Lacko'breath persuades Windenough to restore his stolen respiration.

Breath, as we saw, is here the symbol of male potency. The tale would thus appear to be both a confession of the truth, and a wish-phantasy in which Poe admits himself impotent: it also indirectly conveys that the potency stolen, as it were, by the father, is restored when, at the end of the tale, he rediscovers that same father. Such is the gist of this tale which, rearranged as fiction, relates the infantile and pre-adolescent vicissitudes which beset the development of Poe's sexual potency and the path which, but for them, it might have taken. For having too urgently, at the sadistic-anal stage, desired sole possession of the mother, manifested by yelling and general aggression, his sado-erotic trends were forced into repression by the father, or one in his position. But at what point in his childhood did the actual repression of his instinctual urges take place? These urges the child might have rediscovered and reactivated, as happens at the end of the tale, had this repression been less severe; less early imposed. What happened however, was that from his parents, he went to live with the Allans. There the discipline was equally stern—the coach in the tale—but under a far more crushing father-figure than the skinny Mr. Windenough: whether David Poe or another. The huge and casual traveller surely represents John Allan, while the two other passengers who wedge Lacko'breath between them seem also, as it were, to be buried under his weight: for we do not find them mentioned again. Flung into the road with broken limbs, Lacko'breath then finds himself under the knife of the castrator-surgeon who, like John Allan, "for his own good", tortures and mutilates

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him. The dour merchant, given the stern upbringing he impressed on the child, and the filial respect he whipped into him, must have seemed the very fount of morals, and their inculcation, to the charity orphan he fostered. Rich, honoured and lord of several women, John Allan, like the patriarchs of old or their prehistoric ancestor, the father of the primal horde, allowed himself what he denied the young, and was far better suited to enact the part ordained by fate—that which consisted in subduing the childish soul to the moral code imposed by society—than the indifferent actor David Poe, himself a son in revolt, or the unknown lover of Elizabeth Arnold. Moreover, Edgar's age when he found himself in John Allan's power contributed to the disciplinarian, repressive part the latter was to play for, only after three and, above all, in the latency period which generally begins after five or six—when the first outburst of the child's sexuality subsides—is it ready to receive the repressions imposed by education and morality.

This is not to say that John Allan actually eviscerated his ward like the surgeon in our story. But all physical violence inflicted on the child by the father, in the child's unconscious, is interpreted as a kind of castration, the fear of which archaic retribution finally submerges the Oedipus complex in the unconscious of the small boy.¹ The symbolic evisceration of the unfortunate Mr. Lacko's breath by the well-meaning surgeon, may perhaps be read as displaced from the real punishment inflicted on Edgar "for his own good", by his benefactor's fatherly hand. Col. Ellis, son of John Allan's partner—with whose parents, in 1820, the Allans spent several months after their return from England—testifies in his memoirs that, during this period, Edgar, though almost adolescent, was still whipped by his guardian:

"The only whipping I ever knew Mr. Allan to give him was for carrying me into the fields and woods beyond 'Belvidere' adjacent to what is now Hollywood Cemetery, one Saturday, and keeping me there all day and until after dark, without anybody at home knowing where we were; and for shooting a lot of domestic fowls belonging to the proprietor of 'Belvidere' who was at that time, I think, Judge Bushrod Washington."²

Now, when a father whips a twelve-year-old boy, we may safely conclude that it is not for the first time. Corporal punishment was also the general

¹ Cf. FREUD, *The Passing of the Oedipus-Complex*, *Collected Papers*, Vol. II, p. 269. Trans. from *Der Untergang des Oedipuskomplexes*, 1924. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIII.

² *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 24.

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thing at the time and, had John Allan not occasionally thrashed his ward, despite the tears of the tender-hearted Frances—as happened, for instance, when Edgar pulled away the old lady's chair¹—he would have thought to have failed in his duty.

Be that as it may, it is clear that John Allan represented the male and awe-inspiring "father" through whom Poe's Œdipus complex was so drastically repressed by the physical and moral violence which the child interpreted as castration. It was John Allan who castrated Poe and condemned him to impotence by inflicting, and inculcating, moral standards incompatible with the sado-necrophilist trends of his primary sexual make-up. As a result, these were repressed deep into his unconscious, and were never again to emerge save in the harmless imaginative form of literary production.

* * *

It must never be forgotten, for the true understanding of Poe's psyche, that his unconscious included two distinct forms of the Œdipus complex. For first, to the child, the parental pair had comprised his true father and mother; both actors, both consumptive; David and Elizabeth. Suddenly, at eighteen months old, *i.e.*, in July 1810, that father, David, vanished in New York. One cannot say, therefore, that David Poe, before his disappearance, played any real Œdipal part in the life of his son, since he was then too young and still too immersed in the pre-Œdipal, pregenital stages of libido-development. Later, however, when Edgar lived with John Allan and when the latter, to the child in the Œdipal stage, had acquired the awe-inspiring proportions of the Œdipal father, the real father David Poe, by projection into the past, was doubtless "Œdipalized" in the son's unconscious. It is to this first and, retrospective, Œdipus complex in Poe—which, we must remember, was never experienced on the true Œdipal plane—that the presumptive lover of Elizabeth Arnold, Rosalie's rumoured father, also belongs.

But Edgar, when three, was taken by the Allans. There, a new parental pair took him in charge; the gentle Frances and the dour John Allan. Doubtless, for a time, his pregenital, infantile, and presumably phallic sexuality continued to develop, with its accompanying infantile masturbation, and soon led him, given his mental and concomitant sexual precocity, to the true Œdipal phase. Ever more ardently would he covet the mother's caresses, and ever more fiercely hate the father, his rival, who kept them ineluctably apart. The large and awe-inspiring figure of the father, as every

¹*Israfel*, pp. 54 and 57.

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child, more or less, sees it, thus for Edgar assumed John Allan's dour and hostile characteristics. Frances, his foster-mother, however, had many of the characteristics of his true but vanished mother and, even, the same ill-health. It was at this time, when repression began under the dour, whipping father, a time when his infantile masturbation was doubtless checked and replaced by anxiety, that indelible memory-traces of the first parental pair—or pairs, if we accept the theory of Elizabeth's adultery—must have been Oedipalized and, so, reactivated in his unconscious.

For there is something else we should not forget; namely, that as a babe, Edgar's infantile libido had derived far greater satisfactions from his mother than from anything Frances Allan could provide, given his age at their meeting and the obstacle of John Allan. It is, therefore, no wonder that Poe's libido, then undergoing repression, should remain fixated on the vanished mother; that first mother whose possession no violent father disputed and from whose breast he had fed. In his pregenital, oral and anal phases she had been wholly his as, doubtless, he had been her only tiny companion, in the six months before Rosalie was born.

Frances Allan could never be all this to him and, besides, there was always the dour John Allan with his whip, and harsh reproofs, to remind him that Frances was not his true mother. Thus, in his mind, he would unconsciously revert to that vanished time as to a paradise lost; a time when he had a real mother. So it was the dead Elizabeth, whom he could freely love who, in her avatars, always returned to dwell in his fearful and deathless stories. Another factor, too, must have encouraged this fixation. Poe's precocity as a child, which would result in his ego development doubtless antedating the development of his libido, thus contributing to keep him fixated at that pregenital stage where his true mother reigned supreme.

Thus, if in the first parental pair the dominant figure for Poe was a loved mother, in the second it was the awe-inspiring father. And indeed, for most men, this is the order of the parent's successive importance in time. First the small boy is drawn to the mother who satisfies every wish. Then the father appears, with his moral bans, sunders them, and so shuts the gates on the small son's paradise. But because Edgar was passed from the first parents to the second, the two figures which, for him, embodied the essential qualities of father and mother, were split and recomposed from each couple.

For Poe, the mother, in all her avatars, was ever and always Elizabeth Arnold. The father, even when retrojected into the past on David Poe or another was, always, more or less, John Allan. Thus we find Mr. Wind-

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enough, who so clearly embodies the adventurer David Poe, or his substitute Elizabeth's lover, taxed with avarice as though he were John Allan.

* * *

These considerations singularly illumine the conclusion of *Loss of Breath*. From the moment the hero is shorn of breath and symbolically castrated and, yet again, when he is eviscerated, Poe's unconscious cries halt and rebels. "No!" he seems to cry: "I refuse to be castrated by this wicked father!" Whereupon his hero is hanged, which amounts to re-endowing him with the penis, symbolically and ironically expressed. Follows a prolonged opium stupor, in which he relives the replete babe's pregenital, oral phases at the breast, with all their ancient delights. Then, once more he imagines himself in the womb pursued, for the last time, by the father's penis as an undertaker's screw. Then he is reborn. There, in the sepulchral vault where he has been preceded by both, he rediscovers the mother (pregnant) and the harmless father—David Poe or that other—whom he had known in the pregenital phase when a child. That father is the inventor of Lombardy poplars and other phallic emblems, as well as Doctor of Pneumatics, and happens to have the "breath" which was stolen from him by John Allan. Yet in the story—reversing reality—the father returns his breath and potency to the son so that it is as though Poe were saying: had it been possible, by some sort of retroactive magic, to wipe out the time when he was crushed and mutilated "for his own good" by John Allan, the Œdipal father, he would have retained his potency and never been doomed to life-long impotence. That potency, however, was buried with the dead; there only, by their contact, could it be restored to life. But the gates of Heaven, which would open without fail to "that sinner or saint who, with good lungs and implicit confidence, should vociferate the word 'Amen' ", were ever to remain, for him, the massive portals of the vault of Ulalume: portals he would never open because of the sternness of his upbringing by John Allan.

Thus, this tale, in manifest content a kind of burlesque, reveals its latent content, on analysis, as profoundly tragic. Not without reason does Poe's humour here appear—as ever, for that matter—wearing a gruesome grin. Force himself as he may to ridicule or depreciate the envied potency of the father, by showing him choked by his double breath, or manipulating Mr. Lacko'breath like a puppet, these antics are still funereal and there is something sinister in his sarcasm. Force himself to laugh as he may, to keep back the tears, Poe's laughter is never wholehearted. For, to the impotent, loss of potency is no laughing matter.

Tales of
The Murdered Mother

CHAPTER XXXV

The Man of the Crowd¹

IN December, 1840, after Poe had broken with his employer Burton, there appeared, in the last issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*—just bought by George R. Graham—a strange and enigmatic story showing a new turn in Poe.

"It was well said of a certain German book", begins the narrator, "that '*es lässt sich nicht lesen*'—it does not permit itself to be read. There are some secrets which do not permit themselves to be told. Men die nightly in their beds, wringing the hands of ghostly confessors, and looking them piteously in the eyes—die with despair of heart and convulsion of throat, on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not *suffer themselves* to be revealed. Now and then, alas, the conscience of man takes up a burthen so heavy in horror that it can be thrown down only into the grave. And thus the essence of all crime is undivulged."

The tale proper follows this pious, mystifying prelude. It begins:

"Not long ago, about the closing in of an evening in autumn, I sat at the large bow window of the D— Coffee-House in London. For some months I had been ill in health, but was now convalescent, and, with returning strength, found myself in one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of *ennui*. . . I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in everything. With a cigar in my mouth and a newspaper in my lap, I had been amusing myself for the greater part of the afternoon, now in poring over advertisements, now in observing the promiscuous company in the room, and now in peering through the smoky panes into the street.

¹ *The Man of the Crowd*: *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, December 1840; 1845.

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"This latter is one of the principal thoroughfares of the city, and had been very much crowded during the whole day. But, as the darkness came on, the throng momentarily increased; and, by the time the lamps were well lighted, two dense and continuous tides of population were rushing past the door. . . the tumultuous sea of human heads filled me . . . with a delicious novelty of emotion. I gave up, at length, all care of things within the hotel, and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without.

"At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance."

Thus, among the passers-by, the onlooker is able to detect business men and men of leisure, some phlegmatic, others excitable; "junior clerks of flash houses" and "upper clerks of staunch firms" of the "steady old fellow" type; members of the race of "swell pickpockets", gamblers and parasites. Descending the scale of "what is termed gentility", the watcher finds "darker and deeper themes for speculation", hawk-eyed Jewish pedlars, professional street beggars, "feeble and ghastly invalids", modest young girls proceeding homewards weary from the day's work, prostitutes "of all kinds and of all ages" and drunkards of every sort, not to mention "pie-men, porters, coal-heavers, sweeps" and "organ-grinders".

As the night deepens, however, the character of the crowd alters and its "gentler features" disappear in the "gradual withdrawal of the more orderly portion of the people". The

"late hour brought forth every species of infamy from its den" while "the rays of the gas-lamps, feeble at first in their struggle with the dying day, had now at length gained ascendancy, and threw over everything a fitful and garish lustre. All was dark yet splendid—as that ebony to which has been likened the style of Tertullian."

More and more absorbed in the spectacle, the onlooker scrutinizes the individual faces thrown into relief by the "wild effects" of the light and tells us, that

"although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years".

The hero of this "Turner"ish canvas now appears.

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"With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepid old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age,)—a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. . . I well remember that my first thought, upon beholding it, was that Retszch, had he viewed it, would have greatly preferred it to his own pictural incarnations of the fiend. As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of supreme despair."

Thereupon "aroused, startled, fascinated" by the man's strange countenance and the "wild history . . . written within that bosom", the observer, seized with craving to know more of the stranger, puts on his overcoat, snatches his hat and cane and hurries into the street.

Once he has sighted him in the crowd, the narrator follows closely, "yet cautiously, so as not to attract his attention".

The stranger was

"short in stature, very thin, and apparently very feeble. His clothes, generally, were filthy and ragged; but as he came, now and then, within the strong glare of a lamp, I perceived that his linen, although dirty, was of beautiful texture; and my vision deceived me, or, through a rent in a closely-buttoned and evidently second-hand *roquelaire* which enveloped him, I caught a glimpse both of a diamond and of a dagger. These observations heightened my curiosity, and I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go."

Neither the gathering rain nor fog discourage the pursuer.

"For half an hour the old man held his way with difficulty along the great thoroughfare. . . Never once turning his head to look back, he did not observe me. By and by he passed into a cross street, which, although densely filled with people, was not quite so much thronged as the main one he had quitted. Here a change in his demeanor became evident. He walked more slowly and with less object than before—more hesitatingly. He crossed and re-crossed the way repeatedly without apparent aim. . . The street was a narrow and long one, and his course lay within it for nearly an hour, during which the passengers had gradually diminished. . . A second turn brought us into a square, brilliantly lighted, and overflowing with life. The old manner of the stranger re-appeared. His chin fell upon his breast, while his eyes

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rolled wildly from under his knit brows, in every direction, upon those who hemmed him in. . . I was surprised, however, to find, upon his having made the circuit of the square, that he turned and retraced his steps. Still more was I astonished to see him repeat the same walk several times. . .

"In this exercise he spent another hour, at the end of which we met with far less interruption from passengers than at first. The rain fell fast; the air grew cool; and the people were retiring to their homes. With a gesture of impatience, the wanderer passed into a by-street comparatively deserted. . ."

and hurries down it as though possessed.

"A few minutes brought us to a large and busy bazaar . . . where his original demeanor again became apparent, as he forced his way to and fro, without aim, among the host of buyers and sellers.

"During the hour and a half, or thereabouts, which we passed in this place, it required much caution on my part to keep him in reach without attracting his observation. Luckily I wore a pair of *caoutchouc* over-shoes, and could move about in perfect silence. At no moment did he see that I watched him. . .

But now "a loud-toned clock struck eleven, and the company were fast deserting the bazaar", when the stranger showed signs of great anxiety and ran "with incredible swiftness through many crooked and people-less lanes" till he again emerged outside the D— Hotel on the "great thoroughfare" where first seen by the narrator. The street, however, no longer wore the same aspect.

"It was still brilliant with gas; but the rain fell fiercely, and there were few persons to be seen. The stranger grew pale. He walked moodily some paces up the once populous avenue, then, with a heavy sigh, turned in the direction of the river, and . . . came out, at length, in view of one of the principal theatres. It was about being closed, and the audience were thronging from the doors."

Here the old man eagerly mingles with the crowd, but "the company grew more scattered, and his old uneasiness and vacillation were resumed". For some time he closely follows a party of roisterers but, when these were reduced to three, the

"stranger paused, and, for a moment, seemed lost in thought; then, with every mark of agitation, pursued rapidly a route which brought us to the verge of the city, amid regions very different from those we had hitherto traversed. It was the most noisome quarter of London, where everything wore the worst impress of the most deplorable poverty, and of the most desperate crime. . . The whole atmosphere

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teemed with desolation. Yet . . . sounds of human life revived by sure degrees, and at length large bands of the most abandoned of a London populace were seen reeling to and fro. The spirits of the old man again flickered up, as a lamp which is near its death-hour. Once more he strode onward with elastic tread. Suddenly a corner was turned, a blaze of light burst upon our sight, and we stood before one of the huge suburban temples of Intemperance—one of the palaces of the fiend, Gin."

Then the old man, "with a half shriek of joy", forces a passage within, mingles with the drunken throng and paces, to and fro, without apparent object. But it is now late—nearly daybreak—and the gin-palace is about to close.

"It was something even more intense than despair that I then observed upon the countenance of the singular being whom I had watched so pertinaciously. Yet . . . with a mad energy "he" retraced his steps . . . to the heart of the mighty London. . . The sun arose while we proceeded, and, when we had once again reached that most thronged mart of the populous town, the street of the D— Hotel, it presented an appearance of human bustle and activity scarcely inferior to what I had seen on the evening before. And here, long, amid the momentarily increasing confusion, did I persist in my pursuit of the stranger. But, as usual, he walked to and fro, and during the day did not pass from out the turmoil of that street. And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. 'This old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart of the world is a grosser book than the "*Hortulus Animæ*", and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that *es lässt sich nicht lesen*.' "

Such is this tale, of which Hervey Allen writes:

"It is a curious combination of a 'hero' under the effect of remorse for crime, and the scenes of London which Poe recollected from his sojourn there with the Allans, now grotesquely recalled through the cloud and pall of a dream".¹

* * *

Three points in this tale merit our closer attention. First, who is this "hero"? For the story through which the enigmatic old man wanders, does

¹ *Israfel*, p. 478-9.

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not reveal its meaning at first glance, and the spell it casts on the reader is as much due to its mysterious atmosphere, as to its sweep as a canvas; a symphony in "ebony and silver" of the lamp-lit night of a great city? Yet Poe's description of his hero is sufficiently revealing. This old man, a veritable incarnation of the fiend, he tells us, calls up

"ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of extreme despair".

The reader, however, will already have guessed that, again, we have John Allan before us. One feature alone, "avarice", would almost suffice to suggest it for, this, in his foster-son's eyes, was the main characteristic of the Scotch merchant who was dead six years when Poe wrote this tale. The reader will recall how truly miserly John Allan was to Poe, when the latter was at the University and that the support he withdrew expressed, in anal fashion, the withdrawal of his affection. This was his way of protesting against the weakness shown by his wife for this offshoot of wandering players.

Nor are the old man's other traits less applicable to John Allan. What is his "vast mental power" but the distant echo of that awe which the child would feel for the adult's, and sovereign father's, omniscience? And is not "caution" a most needful quality in merchants who, like John Allan, prove successful? So, too, with his "coolness" which doubtless, at times, so painfully damped the ardour of the young poet. As a child his "malice" had often made Edgar cruelly suffer, as had his "blood-thirstiness" when he whipped him. The result was that the father "bested" the child, as he did his rivals in business, or his wife on those other occasions which, to the child, must have seemed a way of gratifying his bloodthirsty nature. Given so much success, the old man might well show "merriment". Yet his "triumphings" include crimes—crimes too fearful to mention; so fearful, indeed, that they "do not permit themselves" either to be read or told. Thus the "triumph" and "merriment" must, inevitably, be followed by "excessive terror" and by that "intense and extreme despair" which John Allan, to his foster-son's eyes, must have felt when, six years earlier, he died of dropsy, as though by the hands of avenging fate.

It is true, however, that "The Man of the Crowd" is a John Allan fallen on evil days, and one much older than ever was reached by the latter.¹

¹ In the "biographical" memorandum which he gave to Griswold, Poe also represented Mr. Allan as being sixty-five instead of fifty at the time of his second marriage. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, p. 345.)

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To which it might be replied that dropsy ages a man and that Allan must have greatly aged in his latter years. But other distortions are also present, for "The Man of the Crowd" is very thin, whereas dropsy bloats its victims: also his clothes are dirty, and torn, and very unlike those worn by the meticulous, bourgeois John Allan. It is only the stranger's linen that hints at a former wealth—and the glimpse of a diamond and a dagger.

Doubtless this extreme age, famished appearance, and sordid poverty, are all punishments inflicted by the avenging son, in fiction, on the rich, evil father whom Providence, to his mind, did not sufficiently punish during his existence. Thus, to the question, who is the criminal, we can readily reply John Allan or, in more general terms, the father. But to another question, one that would seem of prime importance, the tale provides no answer and even solemnly declares, at the beginning as at the end, that no answer can be given. The story, indeed, tells us that here is the criminal, "This old man . . . the type and genius of deep crime", but to the question, What was his crime? no answer is given, and we are told that none will be vouchsafed: "It will be in vain to follow, for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds".

Let us now recall some biographical details. Poe had seen London and its crowded streets "during his sojourn there with the Allans". This boyhood visit to England lasted from July, 1815, to June, 1820. The family spent three summer months with relatives in Scotland in 1815 and then moved to London, arriving in early October. "The Allans did not immediately find lodgings but upon their arrival in London, stopped at Blake's Hotel."¹ A few days later they moved to a house in Russell Square.

Edgar did not, however, remain long in London, for it was only his "Ma's" and his Aunt Nancy's pleadings which moved John Allan to let Edgar accompany them to London and, then, only on condition he returned to school in Scotland. Towards the end of the year, therefore, John Allan appears to have insisted on his plan and the child, not yet seven, was torn from his "Ma" and returned to Irvine, in company of his cousin James Galt, some eight years his senior. "Edgar, it seems," writes Hervey Allen,

"was very unwilling to part with the family and the women folks pled to keep him in London, but in vain. Poe's character even at this time began to manifest its wilful characteristics. James Galt says that on the voyage back from London to Irvine, Edgar made 'an unceasing fuss all the way'. Young Poe started for Scotland very

¹ *Israfel*, p. 70.

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unwillingly, and he evidently intended to let the world know the state of his feelings."¹

At Irvine, Edgar and James Galt shared a room in Mary Allan's home, she being one of his guardian's sisters. The boys attended the school kept by the disciplinarian Dr. Robertson, where corporal punishment was doubtless the rule.

Edgar found this life little to his liking. We know from James Galt that he, then, already meditated a first "fugue", in the form of running off to America, or defying John Allan and rejoining his "Ma" in London. In any case, Mary Allan found him so difficult that she, herself, brought him to London. It was then that Edgar was sent to board with the Misses Dubourg, whose name he later immortalised in the laundress of the Rue Morgue.

And now, as we learn from Hervey Allen, Frances Allan—that affectionate, though weak and timid woman who, like a mute protective shadow hovered over his childhood and youth—began to suffer from that mysterious and chronic illness which darkened her last thirteen years of life and may have hastened her death. But, at this time, she was thirty-two and, even in 1816, we find John Allan, in a letter to his uncle at Richmond, mentioning her ill-health. The first mention, too, of a letter by Edgar, occurs in one of John Allan's referring to this same illness of his "Ma" who was then (August 1817), at a spa. John Allan writes that his wife would not be returning, with him, to London.²

It was probably in the autumn of 1817 that the small Edgar was sent as boarder to the Rev. Dr. Bransby's school at Stoke Newington. We shall find this ancient school described, and his impressions of it, in the story entitled *William Wilson*. We merely note that there Edgar remained until early in 1820 and that, in June, he accompanied the Allans to America. Throughout this period, close on three years, Mrs. Allan's health, already

¹ *Israfel*, p. 71.

² I.e., pp. 75-76. Hervey Allen says that Mrs. Allan was at Chettingham, but as I have noted (page 15, note 1), this is probably a misprint for Cheltenham, near Gloucester, where the waters are considered, at least now-a-days, beneficial for intestinal disorders and rheumatism.

It is possible that Mrs. Allan's illness may have been rheumatoid arthritis of gonorrhœal origin. We cannot, of course, affirm that John Allan had infected his wife with gonorrhœa for, though Mrs. Allan was childless, John Allan had at least one child by another woman as early as 1815. This was a son, Edwin Collier, whom he put to school at William Erwin's in Richmond. Later, he begot other children, both legitimate and illegitimate.

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hopelessly impaired, constantly gave rise to fears for her condition. We learn from a letter of Miss Galt's, written from Dawlish in October, 1818, to Mary Allan in London, that Mrs. Allan would remain in Devon for her health until November. All the family correspondence at this time carries references to her illness and was to do so until she died. Someone else also fell ill shortly before they left, in punishment for his "crimes"; namely John Allan who, in May, 1820, had his first attack of dropsy, of which malady, fourteen years later, he died.

What conclusion can we draw from these facts? First, that Edgar, four years after his mother's death, saw the second "Ma" given him by fate struck down, in her turn, by a mysterious debilitating illness and that in "mighty London", scene of his first separation from his darling "Ma" from whom, and in spite of whom, he had been torn by the stern, tyrannical "father", John Allan. But not only the son was the father's victim! For to the child's unconscious, which already instinctively senses the nature of sex, violence seems part of the sex act. This is the sadistic concept of coitus which we find more or less in every child, and which we shall see so strikingly expressed in other of Poe's stories. In the small Edgar's unconscious, Frances Allan's unaccountable illness would be attributed to mysterious sexual injuries inflicted by John Allan.

And here the answer begins to dawn to the question which the narrator declared himself unable to answer. That "deep crime" whose burden drives the sinister and avaricious old man perpetually to roam mid the throngs of the great city, is the crime done to the mother's sacred and loved body.

* * *

In the myths which man's age-old mind has engendered, we find other doers of crimes condemned to eternal wanderings. And, to begin with the first, God doomed Cain to be a "fugitive and wanderer . . . in the earth"; that earth—the primal mother-symbol—which, says God: "hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand".¹ Here brother replaces the father—victim of the original *Œdipus* crime.²

An even closer parallel, however, may be drawn between the Man of the Crowd and another myth-pariah, the Wandering Jew. Both are filthy, old, and eternal wandering is the punishment for their crime. In the legend, the Wandering Jew has always some few pence in his pocket,

¹ *Genesis*, IV, 11 and 12.

² Cf. REIK, *Das Kainszeichen (The Mark of Cain)*, *Imago*, 1917.

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which never increase or diminish: similarly, the Man of the Crowd wears a single diamond as a relic of past splendour. But, while the latter's crime is hid in London fogs and wrapped in fearful mystery, legend tells that the Wandering Jew was once a porter at Pilate's door, or else a cobbler in Jerusalem, who earnt their doom by their brutality to Jesus when on his way to the Cross. For Jesus then said: "I go, but thou shalt wait till I come".¹

Other things and figures in myth and legend are also doomed to perpetual motion because of some hidden crime as, for instance, the Flying Dutchman and the Wild Huntsman.

In the version recorded by Sir Walter Scott, the Flying Dutchman was said to be endlessly doomed to roam the seas in punishment for some horrible and mysterious crime which was committed on board, and thus drew pestilence on the crew and banishment from every port.

Another version attributes this doom to the captain's impious obstinacy in striving to round the Cape of Good Hope despite all contrary winds, "even though it took him to Judgment Day". Whereupon Providence took him at his word!²

The Wild Huntsman of legend—originally, to the Germans and Scandinavians, Wotan himself—followed by his wolves and pack, rides through the storm pursuing some fantastic animal. Most races have several versions of this myth, where the hunt through eternity, in all cases, represents the punishment inflicted on some hunter for too great prowess in, and mad addiction to, the chase.³

The theme of punishment inflicted on the great, for abusing power, is

¹ According to *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, 15th Edition, 1930 (article *Ewiger Jude*, Wandering Jew, literally, *Eternal Jew*), the best known version of the legend of the Wandering Jew is that of the cobbler of Jerusalem. Our earliest trace of this legend, in its classic form, where Ahasuerus is given as the name of the Jew, is dated 1602, and occurs in the story by Paul von Eitzen, Bishop of Schleswig, who appears to derive it from earlier versions of an analogous legend. The first of these seems to have appeared in the seventh century and tells of one Malchus, Caiphas' doorkeeper, who was punished for striking our Lord.

As already pointed out, the theme of the murderer condemned to wander the earth goes back to the first murderer Cain, and, in all probability, is found in the folklore of all civilizations.

² Cf. *The Reader's Handbook*, by E. Cobham Brewer, (London; Chatto and Windus, 1925). See also *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, quoted above, from which we learn that the age-old legend of a ship under a curse seems to have assumed its modern form as a result of the great discoveries of the fifteenth century and especially those connected with Vasco da Gama's voyages.

³ Cf. Róheim, *Die wilde Jagd (The Wild Hunt)*. *Imago*, 1926, IV.

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found in many a myth where heights, or isolated rocks, are deemed to represent some guilty ruler, turned into stone as punishment for his crimes. Such is the legend of the Watzmann found in Upper Bavaria.

The Watzmann, the highest of the peaks dominating the Königssee, was once a cruel and tyrannical king who persecuted men and beasts. He was especially cruel to the peasants, who sought to protect their fields from the depredations of the royal game, which did immense damage. He would keep these peasants immured in his dungeons and cut off their right hands. One wretched shepherd boy was punished by having his tendons of Achilles cut and, thereafter, could only drag miserably about. Another time, the Watzmann's hunt rode over an old woman seated outside her hut with her little grandson, so that both met a horrible death.¹ Another version has it that the Watzmann made his dogs devour the old woman and her grandson,² although, in the first version, this is the fate of the babe's parents when, horror-struck, they hasten to the scene. In any case, in punishment, the Watzmann, with all his family, are turned to stone.

We need not continue these references. Enough has been said to indicate the deep relationship between "The Man of the Crowd" and the legendary and damned figures we have cited. All these accursed souls once stood for father-figures. In the legends of the German peoples, the Wild Huntsman, we learn from Róheim, was originally Wotan, the mighty father deity. The Flying Dutchman was a mighty captain, the Watzmann a king. Even the Wandering Jew, despite the squalor to which he has sunk, is none the less generally named Ahasuerus, the name given in the Bible to Xerxes, the great Persian king.³ And have we not, at times, also been told that he embodies the whole of that patriarchal race which crucified Jesus, Son of God?

As to the crime these father-figures committed, this always, basically, appears to be the same. Roheim has shown that the strange animal pursued by the Wild Huntsman, symbolises the sexual pursuit of the woman and, specifically, of the mother.⁴ This, in the son's eyes, is the criminal act for which the father must eternally be doomed to pursue the desired, but

¹ Julius Tischendorf, *Das deutsche Vaterland (The German Fatherland)*. Leipzig; Ernst Wunderlich, 1925.

² Albrecht Kinzinger, *Bayrisches Sagenbuch (Bavarian Legends)*, Munich, 1922.

³ *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, article *Ahasuerus* and *Der Grosse Brockhaus*, article *Ahasverus*.

⁴ Op. cit., page 422, note 3.

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never attained, mother. Moreover, we know, from analysing dreams, how frequently riding and walking symbolise the sex act. A similar meaning lies behind the endless voyagings of the Flying Dutchman. We find its latent significance preserved in Wagner's opera though, owing to the composer's complexes, the captain there, by further elaboration, has come to represent the son. Thus, logically enough, he ends his voyagings by union in death with the sea, which always symbolises the mother. As to the legend of the Wandering Jew, its basic resemblance to the two foregoing legends becomes apparent, when we compare it with that of the Watzmann, which forms the connecting link.¹ For, as we saw, the Watzmann's main crime was that *against the son*, as the Wandering Jew's was against Jesus, Son of God. A harmless shepherd boy is mutilated and, ever after, must drag himself on the ground, here representing the earth-mother, this then being equated with castration of the son and consequent impotence as regards the mother. Further, the Watzmann kills another child which, as it were, inverts the Œdipus situation, so that Laius commits the crime. What was suppressed in the legend of the Wandering Jew reappears in that of the Watzmann: he rides down the mother. This Laius wipes out the son and makes a sado-sexual attack on the mother. The human unconscious must also have seen the legend of the Wandering Jew as something similar, in that he embodies a patriarchal race which, like a Xerxes, wished for undisputed possession of the earth-mother and crucified the son. The punishment, therefore, of the Wandering Jew, as of the protagonists of the legends we have cited—all wishful phantasies of downtrodden sons—is to be doomed, until Judgment Day, to roam Mother-earth, without ever being able to possess her.

The Man in the Crowd is an old rake (*vieux marcheur*) of the same sort. For a whole night and a day and, until "the shades of the second evening" draw on and his pursuer, "wearied unto death", gives up the chase, he wanders and will doubtless continue to wander without let or pause. What he pursues is suggested, to our mind, by a circumstance in Poe's description of the crowd, for though he devotes only half a page to describing the women in the streets, they are almost all prostitutes. And though it is mostly such

¹ I may mention here the *Reader's Handbook* (see above, page 422, note 2) which, under the heading *Wandering Jew*, relates that the legend of the Wild Huntsman, called by Shakespeare "Herne the Hunter", and by Père Mathieu "Saint Hubert", sometimes occurs in the following variant: namely, that the Huntsman was a Jew who prevented Christ from drinking at a horse-trough and pointed instead to the stagnant water in the muddy hoof-print of a horse, as though that was where he should drink. (After Kuhn von Schwarz, *Nord-deutsche Sagen*, 499.)

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women who frequent the streets at night this emphasis, nevertheless, underlines the sex element in the old man's quest.

The "crowd" and multiplicity of women would seem—as in dreams, of which this tale bears so many features—to stand for their opposite; namely, John Allan's crime to Frances. That violence which, in Edgar's eyes, caused her illness, and was inflicted when they were *alone*, in the privacy of their bedroom.

* * *

The son's Œdipus complex thus engendered, by projection, this legend of the father punished for the dual crime which the son is forbidden to commit; the seizure of the mother and the destruction of the troublesome rival; here, the son. A mysterious crime has been committed on board the Flying Dutchman; the Watzmann has seized and mutilated a woman's son; the Wandering Jew has helped to harry God the Son to death; John Allan drove Edgar from London to Irvine. Each such instance, in the son's unconscious, is a crime that merits sentencing the father.

Yet the legends of these eternally wandering fathers are but milder expressions of the original Œdipal wishes of the small boy who, desiring all of his mother's love, first and foremost wishes the death of the irksome father. This death, however, is represented in the unconscious, since the unconscious cannot conceive death, as a *departing* from which the father never returns. To depart, in the unconscious, is equivalent to dying though, consciously, it affects us less than death. The imagining, therefore, of these hated fathers, whether the Wild Huntsman, Flying Dutchman, Wandering Jew or Man of the Crowd, as doomed to eternal wandering, corresponds somewhat, in legend, to what happens in courts of law, where the death penalty is commuted to hard labour for life. The father receives a harsh sentence but no one can say he was killed. Even the death penalty is here represented by its opposite; sempiternal activity and existence.

Strangely enough, nature provides an animal parallel to the above. Ape¹ hunters, in Africa, have observed that these anthropoids live in groups which comprise an adult male with two, three, or four females and their young and that, often, among the wives, an older female is found who, evidently, is the mother of this tiny troop. Very old males, however, no longer have troops and are found wandering alone in the forests. They have taken this way of escaping the death which, doubtless, their grown

¹ My source for these statements is information communicated by Veterinary-Colonel Wilbert, for many years Director of the Pasteur Institute at Kindia.

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sons would inflict in the heat of the mating season. Only their flight to the woods saves them from this fate. No doubt, in the dawn of time, old men saved their lives in this manner. It was not so much the son's pity, as his own flight, that saved the father of the Primal Horde from being slaughtered.

These happenings in the history of the race, like many another, have continued to live on in myth to give us the legends we have cited, and this story by Poe.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The Murders in the Rue Morgue¹

IN *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, we see reversed the situation which confronted us in *The Man of the Crowd*. There we were introduced to the criminal, but left in ignorance of his crime; here the crime is known, but not the criminal. His identity is what this first of our modern detective stories claims to reveal.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue first appeared in *Graham's Magazine* for April, 1841. This important review was founded by Graham, amalgamating *Atkinson's Casket* with *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. *The Man of the Crowd* had appeared in the latter some three months before, but a period of deep depression, after his rupture with Burton, had made it impossible for Poe to assume the editorship of *Graham's* and, in the interval, no new tales appeared from his pen.

One might ask whether Poe's bitter hostility to Burton, his quondam employer, and his outburst of hate against this buffoonish, fantastic man who had sold his review to buy a theatre, may not have been the external event which, just then, reactivated the theme of the father's crime. Was it not, too, at this time that Poe resumed his heavy drinking? Burton, at least, accused him of it. Be that as it may, what is certain is that, beginning with *The Man of the Crowd*, a new and yet bloodier trend became manifest in Poe's works; a trend which even appeared before Virginia's first hæmoptysis in January, 1842.

* * *

The Murders in the Rue Morgue opens with some disjointed considerations on "the mental features discoursed of as the analytical", wherein Poe strives to distinguish between the powers of *analysis* "when inordinately

¹ *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (*Graham's Magazine*, April 1841; 1843; 1845).

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possessed" and mere ingenuity, or the skill in calculation necessary to the mathematician or chess-player.

Poe maintains that the successful whist player needs a higher degree of "analytical" ability than the chess player, which ability he defines as the exact and subtle observation of the thoughts, feelings, and acts of others. He then proceeds to his narrative proper, which he says, is "somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the propositions just advanced".

"Residing in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18—", he begins,

"I there became acquainted with a Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. This young gentleman was of an excellent—indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he ceased to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes."

This might, indeed, echo the feelings of "General" Poe's grandson as regards his descent in the social scale, even though—except, perhaps, in his deep depressions, like that which followed his break with Burton—he went on dreaming of an immensely successful *Penn Magazine*, which would make him the one outstanding figure in American literary life. To Dupin, however, . . .

"by courtesy of his creditors, there still remained . . . a small remnant of his patrimony; and, upon the income arising from this, he managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessities of life, without troubling himself about its superfluities. Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries. . ."

It is almost as though he were describing Mrs. Clemm's home, in which Poe's shelves of books were the one "luxury". All that is added appears to be Dupin's "small remnant of patrimony" and "income" which, evidently, represent Poe's own wish-phantasies. His only patrimony, however, was Muddy's needle and her resourcefulness when earnings fell short at Burton's, or depression paralysed his pen.

"Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in search of the same rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion. We saw each other again and again. I was deeply interested in the little family history which he detailed to me. . . I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagina-

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tion. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price. . .”

Thus, the two friends decide to share lodgings and the narrator, in easier circumstances than his friend, takes it on himself to furnish

“in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not inquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain.

“Had the routine of our life at this place been known to the world, we should have been regarded as madmen. . . Our seclusion was perfect. . . Indeed, the locality of our retirement had been carefully kept a secret from my own former associates; and it had been many years since Dupin had ceased to know or be known in Paris. We existed within ourselves alone.

“It was a freak of fancy in my friend . . . to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrierie* . . . I quietly fell. . . The sable divinity would not herself dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence. At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the massy shutters of our old building; lighted a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams—reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets, arm and arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford.”

Thus, these strange friends, united by a mysterious affinity, pass their days in the spectral light of perfumed tapers and in the lugubrious setting we find in *Ligeia*. As for their nights, they spend them in the crowded streets of the city, amid “wild lights and shadows”, already familiar to us in *The Man of the Crowd*. Indeed, it is as though they, too, were pursuing that sinister ancient.

“At such times,” continues our narrator,

“I could not help remarking and admiring . . . a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin. He seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its exercise. . . He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own. His manner at these moments was

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frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression;¹ while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the phantasy of a double Dupin—the creative and the resolvent.”

The observation is just, the only difference being that it is not Dupin but the author who is thus “double”, his personality being split into the initial characters of the tale—Dupin the analyst, and his friend the narrator, or creative artist.

* * *

And now we come to the episode relating to the actor, Chantilly, as though to illustrate and expound Dupin’s powers.

“We were strolling one night down a long dirty street, in the vicinity of the Palais Royal. Being both, apparently, occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least. All at once Dupin broke forth with these words:—

“‘He is a very little fellow, that’s true, and would do better for the *Théâtre des Variétés*.’

“‘There can be no doubt of that,’ I replied unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.

“‘Dupin,’ said I gravely, ‘this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of —?’ Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.

¹ The close relationship between Dupin and Sherlock Holmes is evidenced by more than one common trait. In *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Holmes made his bow to the public, Conan Doyle says of him: “Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning till evening. On these occasions I have noted such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have supposed him to be addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.”

Again, in Chapter VII of the same book, Holmes reflects on the *outré* character (the very word used by Poe) of the crime he is called upon to solve, considering it a distinguishing feature of the case which should help its elucidation. Even Sherlock Holmes’s famous pipe is first smoked by Dupin in *The Purloined Letter*.

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—“‘of Chantilly,’ said he, ‘why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy.’

“This was precisely what had formed the object of my reflections. Chantilly was a *quondam* cobbler of the Rue St. Denis, who, becoming stage-mad, had attempted the rôle of Xerxes, in Crébillon’s tragedy so called, and been notoriously Pasquinaded for his pains.

“‘Tell me, for Heaven’s sake,’ I exclaimed, ‘the method—if method there is—by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter.’”

Thereupon Dupin, in “whom there was not a particle of *charlatanerie*”, proceeds to expound how he reached his astonishing conclusion.

“It was the fruiterer—”, he explains, who was the starting-point for his reflections. At a turning in the street, a fruiterer’s boy had jostled the narrator and thrust him towards a pile of paving stones, on a loose fragment of which he had slightly sprained his ankle. This accident had led the narrator to think of “stereotomy”, a name applied to an improved type of paving with overlapping and riveted blocks. “Stereotomy”, by its sound, had suggested “atomies”, and thus the theories of Epicurus. Thence it was but a step to the “late nebular cosmogony”, which had confirmed this philosopher’s theories. The stars brought thoughts of Orion, just then bright overhead and, by way of a line of Latin referable to Orion (formerly written Urion), *Perdidit antiquum litera prima sonum*, to Chantilly, the cobbler-actor who, changing his name with his profession, had earned a bitter tirade in the previous day’s *Musée*, where this line had been quoted. Finally, observation of his friend’s gestures and smile had confirmed Dupin in his deductions. The fact that the friend could not fail to associate the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly was revealed by the “character of the smile” that passed over his lips. “‘You thought,’” says Dupin,

“‘of the poor cobbler’s immolation. So far, you had been stooping in your gait; but now I saw you draw yourself up to your full height. I was then sure that you reflected upon the diminutive figure of Chantilly. At this point I interrupted your meditations to remark that as, in fact, he *was* a very little fellow—that Chantilly—he would do better at the *Théâtre des Variétés*.’”

This ex-cobbler, who covers himself with ridicule in attempting to play Xerxes—or Ahasuerus—in this bizarre and unexpected form, might well be our Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, the one-time cobbler in Jerusalem. But it is our Paris cobbler’s new profession that arrests our attention for, becoming “stage-mad”, he turns actor, a tragedian in fact, and so recalls

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David Poe, the author's father who, abandoning both home and profession—in his case, law—threw 'in his lot with the Virginia Players. Chantilly's luckless début as a tragedian, which again reminds us of Mr. Lacko'breath and his rantings, evidently harks back to David Poe's mediocrity as an actor and his unflattering reception by the public.

Like the Wandering Jew, Chantilly, the cobbler, is a father stripped of his prestige: the impotent father, in fact. Like Mr. Lacko'breath, he is short-winded and squat. He is not even ironically corpulent, like Lacko'breath, but in all respects is "a very little fellow". Indeed, as he thinks of him, the narrator draws himself to his full height; the son, in other words, is conscious of his superiority over his father. And Edgar Poe was, in truth, an artist of very different calibre from his father.

Having thus "immolated", or rather *eliminated* the "first" father, that derisory and impotent actor, Poe immediately passes to the story's main problem: the deed of blood, and by whom committed.

* * *

"Not long after this, we were looking over an evening edition of the 'Gazette des Tribunaux', when the following paragraphs arrested our attention.

"'EXTRAORDINARY MURDERS.—This morning, about three o'clock, the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Roch were aroused from sleep by a succession of terrific shrieks, issuing, apparently, from the fourth story of a house in the Rue Morgue, known to be in the sole occupancy of one Madame L'Espanaye, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye. After some delay, occasioned by a fruitless attempt to procure admission in the usual manner, the gateway was broken in with a crowbar, and eight or ten of the neighbors entered, accompanied by two *gendarmes*. By this time the cries had ceased; but, as the party rushed up the first flight of stairs, two or more rough voices, in angry contention, were distinguished, and seemed to proceed from the upper part of the house. As the second landing was reached, these sounds, also, had ceased, and everything remained perfectly quiet. The party spread themselves, and hurried from room to room. Upon arriving at a large back chamber in the fourth story (the door of which, being found locked, with the key inside, was forced open), a spectacle presented itself which struck everyone present not less with horror than with astonishment.

"The apartment was in the wildest disorder—the furniture broken and thrown about in all directions. There was only one bedstead; and from this the bed had been removed, and thrown into the middle of the floor. On a chair lay a razor, besmeared with blood. On the hearth

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were two or three long and thick tresses of grey human hair, also dabbled in blood, and seeming to have been pulled out by the roots. Upon the floor were found four Napoleons, an ear-ring of topaz, three large silver spoons, three smaller of *métal d'Alger*, and two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold. The drawers of a *bureau*, which stood in one corner, were open, and had been, apparently, rifled, although many articles still remained in them. A small iron safe was discovered under the *bed* (not under the bedstead). It was open, with the key still in the door. It had no contents beyond a few old letters, and other papers of little consequence.

“Of Madame L'Espanaye no traces were here seen; but an unusual quantity of soot being observed in the fire-place, a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom; it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance. The body was quite warm. Upon examining it, many excoriations were perceived, no doubt occasioned by the violence with which it had been thrust up and disengaged. Upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, bruises and deep indentations of finger nails, as if the deceased had been throttled to death.

“After a thorough investigation of every portion of the house, without farther discovery, the party made its way into a small paved yard in the rear of the building, where lay the corpse of the old lady, with her throat so entirely cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off. The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated—the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity.

“To this horrible mystery there is not as yet, we believe, the slightest clew.”

The next day's issue of the paper contained the following depositions:

Pauline Dubourg, a laundress employed by the deceased, declared she had never met any persons in the house when calling for the washing or taking it home, and was sure the two women kept no servant.

Pierre Moreau, tobacconist, stated he had sold Madame L'Espanaye small quantities of tobacco and snuff over a period of four years. . .

“The two lived an exceedingly retired life—were reputed to have money.” Many other neighbours testified to the same effect.

Isidore Muset, *gendarme*, deposed

“that he was called to the house about three o'clock in the morning, and found some twenty or thirty persons at the gateway, endeavoring to gain admittance. Forced it open, at length, with a bayonet—not with a crowbar. . .”

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He substantiated the story that screams had been heard, followed by

“‘two voices in loud and angry contention—the one a gruff voice, the other much shriller—a very strange voice. Could distinguish some words of the former, which was that of a Frenchman. Was positive that it was not a woman’s voice. Could distinguish the words *sacré* and *diable*’”.

(Others claimed to have heard the exclamation *Mon Dieu!* also.) On the other hand . . . the

“shrill voice was that of a foreigner. Could not be sure whether it was the voice of a man or of a woman. Could not make out what was said, but believed the language to be Spanish!”

“Henri Duval, a neighbor, and by trade a silversmith,” deposed “that he was one of the party who first entered the house.” Corroborated “the testimony of Musset in general,” with the exception that, in his opinion,

“‘the shrill voice was . . . that of an Italian. . . Could not be sure that it was a man’s voice. It might have been a woman’s. Was not acquainted with the Italian language.’”

Odenheimer, *restaurateur*, a Dutchman speaking no French

“was examined through an interpreter. . . Corroborated the previous evidence in every respect but one. Was sure that the shrill voice was that of a man—of a Frenchman. . . ”

The deposition of Jules Mignaud, banker, followed. Mme. L’Espanaye had an account at his bank and three days before her death had, in person, withdrawn 4000 francs. “‘This sum was paid in gold, and a clerk sent home with the money.’”

The clerk, Adolphe Le Bon, next deposed that

“‘on the day in question, about noon, he accompanied Madame L’Espanaye to her residence with the 4000 francs put up in two bags. Upon the door being opened, Mademoiselle L. appeared and took from his hands one of the bags, while the old lady relieved him of the other. He then bowed and departed. Did not see any person in the street at the time. It is a bye-street—very lonely.’”

Suffice it to add that William Bird, an Englishman and tailor, deposed that the shrill voice appeared to be that of a German, a language he did not know; that Alfonso Garcia, Spanish undertaker, was convinced the

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voice spoke English, of which he was equally ignorant, and that Alberto Montani, Italian confectioner, believed the voice to be that of a Russian, though he had never "conversed with a native of Russia". Montani also said the voice was gruff and a Frenchman's, apparently "expostulating".

The further examination of the witnesses established that

" 'the windows, both of the back and front room, were down and firmly fastened from within. A door between the two rooms was closed, but not locked. The door leading from the front room into the passage was locked, with the key on the inside' "

as, it will be remembered, was the door leading into the large back chamber from the stairway. Thus it was clear that the murderer could not have escaped by the stairs.

" 'There was not an inch of any portion of the house which was not carefully searched. Sweeps were sent up and down the chimneys. The house was a four story one, with garrets (*mansardes*). A trap-door on the roof was nailed down very securely—did not appear to have been opened for years.' "

Several witnesses, recalled,

" 'testified that the chimneys of all the rooms on the fourth story were too narrow to admit the passage of a human being. By "sweeps" were meant cylindrical sweeping-brushes, such as are employed by those who clean chimneys. These brushes were passed up and down every flue in the house. There is no back passage by which any one could have descended while the party proceeded upstairs. The body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye was so firmly wedged in the chimney that it could not be got down until four or five of the party united their strength.' "

Followed the testimony of Paul Dumas, physician and Alexandre Etienne, surgeon, summoned at daybreak to examine the bodies.

" 'They were both then lying on the sacking of the bedstead in the chamber where Mademoiselle L. was found. The corpse of the young lady was much bruised and excoriated. . . There were several deep scratches just below the chin, together with a series of livid spots which were evidently the impression of fingers. The face was fearfully discolored and the eye-balls protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through. . . The corpse of the mother was horribly mutilated. All the bones of the right leg and arm were more or less shattered. The left *tibia* much splintered, as well as all the ribs of the left side. Whole body dreadfully bruised and discolored. It was not possible to

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say how the injuries had been inflicted. . . The head of the deceased, when seen by witness, was entirely separated from the body, and was also greatly shattered. The throat had evidently been cut with some very sharp instrument—probably with a razor.’”¹

Thereupon the report concluded with the following comment:

“ ‘A murder so mysterious, and so perplexing in all its particulars, was never before committed in Paris—if indeed a murder has been committed at all. The police are entirely at fault . . . ’ ”

The evening edition added nothing of importance beyond an announcement that the bank clerk, Adolphe Le Bon, had been arrested and imprisoned.

Dupin, though seeming “singularly interested in the progress of this affair” has, so far, made no comment. But now, learning of Le Bon’s arrest, he finally breaks silence and asks his friend for his opinion on the case. The latter, however, answers that, like all Paris, he considers it an insoluble mystery. To this, Dupin remarks that “Truth is not always in a well”, and adds:

“As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An enquiry will afford us amusement . . . and besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful. We will go and see the premises . . . I know G—, the Prefect of Police, and shall have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission.”

Permission is obtained and the two friends proceed to the Rue Morgue. “This is one of those miserable thoroughfares which intervene between the Rue Richelieu and the Rue St. Roch.”² They reach it late in the afternoon, find the house, and pass to the rear of the premises, during which Dupin examines the whole neighbourhood, as well as the house, with the

¹ R. Piédelièvre and R. Chonez, in an article in *Paris-Médical*, November 21 1931 (*Edgar Poe, médecin légiste*) have called attention to Poe’s errors in medical jurisprudence in this description. If the head of the mother was so nearly severed as to “fall off” in the attempt to raise the body, it would surely have been detached in the fall from the window. Further, such a fall would not, of itself, suffice to produce the “horrible mutilations” and the “dreadfully bruised and discolored” condition of which mention is made, which thus deprives Dupin’s conclusions that the corpse must have been thrown from the window of much of their value. But, as our authors themselves say, these errors are of small importance in a work of art, where what counts is the imaginative spell cast on the reader.

² We may remind the reader that Poe was never in Paris.

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closest attention. They are then admitted into the house by the officers in charge after showing their credentials, and mount to the room where the corpses still lie. "The disorders of the room had . . . been suffered to exist. I saw nothing," confesses the narrator, "beyond what had been stated in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*." Dupin, however, "scrutinized every thing,—not excepting the bodies of the victims", the other rooms and the yard. "The examination occupied us until dark, when we took our departure. On our way home my companion stopped in for a moment at the office of one of the daily papers."

Dupin now declined all conversation on the murders until next morning, when he "asked me, suddenly, if I had observed any thing *peculiar* at the scene of the atrocity", and is told nothing more than they had both seen in the paper.

"The '*Gazette*,' replied Dupin,

"has not entered, I fear, into the unusual horror of the thing. . . It appears to me that this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded as easy of solution—I mean for the *outré* character of its features. The police are confounded by the seeming absence of motive—not for the murder itself—but for the atrocity of the murder. They are puzzled, too, by the seeming impossibility of reconciling the voices heard in contention, with the facts that no one was discovered upstairs but the assassinated *Made-moiselle L'Espanaye*, and that there were no means of egress without the notice of the party ascending.' "

To which Dupin later adds:

"In fact, the facility with which I shall arrive, or have arrived, at the solution of this mystery, is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police.' "

To his friend's increasing amazement, Dupin, looking towards the door of the apartment, adds:

"I am now awaiting a person who, although perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration. Of the worst portion of the crimes committed, it is probable that he is innocent. . . I look for the man here—in this room—every moment. . . Should he come, it will be necessary to detain him. Here are pistols. . .'"

"I have already," says the narrator, "spoken of his abstract manner at such times. His discourse was addressed to myself; but his voice, although by no means loud, had that intonation which is commonly

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employed in speaking to some one at a great distance. His eyes, vacant in expression, regarded only the wall."

Dupin, as though soliloquizing, for form's sake considers, and makes short work of, the theory that the old woman may first have killed her daughter and then herself, and asks his friend whether he has not noticed something strange in the depositions of the witnesses. Naturally enough, the narrator remarks that all were agreed that the gruff voice was "that of a Frenchman", though each differed as to the owner of the high, shrill voice. Whereupon Dupin asks him to note that each witness, when describing the shrill voice, referred to it "as that of a *foreigner*". Further, each witness believes the words thus uttered were in a language he did not know. " 'No words—no sounds resembling words—were, by any witness, mentioned as distinguishable!' " These details have awakened a suspicion in Dupin's mind which he still keeps to himself, though, as he says, it gave "a definite form" to his enquiries.

"Let us now transport ourselves, in fancy, to this chamber," Dupin continues. "What shall we first seek here? The means of egress employed by the murderers. . . Let us examine, each by each, the possible means of egress." Not trusting the eyes of the police, he had himself examined all the floors, ceilings, and walls and was at last satisfied, in his turn, that no secret issues existed. Besides, "both doors leading from the rooms into the passage were securely locked, with the keys inside!" . . . and the chimneys, "although of ordinary width for some eight or ten feet above the hearths", would "not admit, throughout their extent, the body of a large cat". No possibility of egress thus remains except the windows and "through those of the front room no one could have escaped without notice from the crowd in the street. The murderers *must* have passed, then, through those of the back room. . .

" 'There are two windows in the chamber,' he continues:

" 'one of them is unobstructed by furniture, and is wholly visible. The lower portion of the other is hidden from view by the head of the unwieldy bedstead. . . The former was found securely fastened from within. It resisted the utmost force of those who endeavored to raise it. A large gimlet-hole had been pierced in its frame to the left, and a very stout nail was found fitted therein, nearly to the head. Upon examining the other window, a similar nail was seen similarly fitted in it; and a vigorous attempt to raise this sash, failed also. The police were now entirely satisfied that egress had not been in these directions. And, *therefore*, it was thought a matter of supererogation to withdraw the nails and open the windows.' "

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Dupin, however, is subtler in his reasoning. " 'Here it was, I knew,' " he says, " 'that all apparent impossibilities *must* be proved to be not such in reality.' " He is positive, *a posteriori*, that the murderers *did* escape from one of these windows. But how is he to reconcile this with the fact that the sashes of both windows were found closed? Dupin thereupon concludes that the sashes *must* have the power of fastening automatically. " 'I stepped to the unobstructed casement,' " he says,

" 'withdrew the nail . . . and attempted to raise the sash. It resisted all my efforts, as I had anticipated. A concealed spring must, I now knew, exist. . . A careful search soon brought to light the hidden spring. . . I now replaced the nail and regarded it attentively. A person passing out through this window might have reclosed it, and the spring would have caught—but the nail could not have been replaced. . . . The assassins *must* have escaped through the other window. Supposing, then, the springs upon each sash to be the same . . . there *must* be found a difference between the nails. . . Getting upon the sacking of the bedstead, I looked over the head-board minutely at the second casement. . . . ' "

There, too, Dupin discovers a spring and a nail. This nail, he tells us, had,

" 'in every respect, the appearance of its fellow in the other window; but this fact was an absolute nullity (conclusive as it might seem to be) when compared with the consideration that here, at this point, terminated the clew'. 'There *must* be something wrong,' I said, 'about the nail'. I touched it; and the head, with about a quarter of an inch of the shank, came off in my fingers. The rest of the shank was in the gimlet-hole, where it had been broken off."

Carefully replacing the nail head, he presses the spring and raises the sash a few inches, whereupon "the head went up with it, remaining firm in its bed". When the window is closed again, "the semblance of the whole nail was again perfect".

One portion of the mystery is thus unravelled. " 'The assassin had escaped through the window which looked upon the bed' ", the window had closed after him, and the police had attributed the resistance of the sash, held by the spring, for that of the nail.

" 'The next question is that of the mode of descent' ", continues Dupin, while his spell-bound friend follows the subtle chain of deductions. Examining the building, Dupin had observed that a lightning-rod ran along the outer wall about five and a half feet from the casement in

question. From this rod it would have been impossible to reach the window itself. But the shutters, the upper portion of which were "latticed, or worked in open trellis", were fully three and a half feet wide. It would therefore be possible for someone of unusual "activity and courage", after climbing the lightning-rod to the level of the open shutter, two and a half feet away, to grasp it firmly and, "placing his feet securely against the wall, and springing boldly from it", to swing himself in through the window, presuming it open at the time, and close the shutter behind him.

Here Dupin insists on the "*very extraordinary*" agility necessary to accomplish this feat, and asks his friend to juxtapose this with

"that very *peculiar* shrill (or harsh) and *unequal* voice, about whose nationality no two persons could be found to agree, and in whose utterance no syllabification could be detected".

"At these words," says the narrator, "a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin flitted over my mind. I seemed to be upon the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend—as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember."

Dupin continues: "'You will see . . . that I have shifted the question from the mode of egress to that of ingress. It was my design that both were effected in the same manner, at the same point. Now let us revert to the interior of the room' ",

and so saying observes that although the bureau was apparently rifled, the four thousand francs in gold, in particular, had been left. Thus, the motive for the crime could not have been robbery.

Next, one by one, he considers the more atrocious details of this crime and, in especial, the strength needed to thrust the daughter's body up the chimney, tear out the mother's locks and adherent portions of scalp, and all but sever her head with a razor. Now "'combine the ideas of an agility astounding,'" says Dupin,

"'a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice . . . devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?'"

That an escaped maniac had committed the crime, says the friend, but Dupin objects that even the utterances of madmen have the "coherence of syllabification". "'Besides,'" he adds,

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“ ‘the hair of a madman is not such as I now hold in my hand. I disentangled this little tuft from the rigidly clutched fingers of Madame L’Espanaye.’ ”

Our opinion of the police, already none too high, diminishes further when we learn that they have not only failed to open the window by which the criminal escaped, but have not even examined the victim’s hands! Fortunately, however, we have Dupin, who now exhibits a sheet of paper on which is sketched the “ ‘dark bruises and deep indentations of finger nails’ ” found on the throat of Mademoiselle L’Espanaye. Asking his friend to place all his fingers in the respective impressions, Dupin demonstrates that their spread far exceeds that of the human hand.

Here Dupin places an open book under the narrator’s eyes, which contains “a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands”. In a flash, the narrator comprehends “the full horrors of the murder”. . . Nevertheless, he asks, what of the second voice, that was heard to expostulate, in French, *mon Dieu, diable, sacré?* This, Dupin explains as doubtless a Frenchman cognisant of the murder, though probably “ ‘innocent of all participation in the bloody transactions which took place. The Ourang-Outang may have escaped from him.’ ” . . . and be still at large. The previous evening, therefore, Dupin had caused the following advertisement to be inserted in “Le Monde”, (a paper devoted to the shipping interest, and much sought by sailors):

“ ‘CAUGHT—*In the Bois de Boulogne, early in the morning of the —inst., (the morning of the murder) a very large, tawny Ourang-Outang of the Bornese species. The owner, (who is ascertained to be a sailor, belonging to a Maltese vessel,) may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily, and paying a few charges arising from its capture and keeping. Call at No. —, Rue —, Faubourg St. Germain—au troisième.* ”

That the owner of the Ourang was a sailor on a Maltese vessel, Dupin inferred from the knot of greasy ribbon which he had found at the foot of the lightning-conductor, a knot which “few sailors can tie” and “peculiar to the Maltese” and one, evidently, which served to bind the hair “ ‘into one of those long *queues* of which sailors are so fond’ ”. If, however, Dupin adds, he is wrong in his inductions, no harm will be done, whereas, if he is right, “ ‘a great point is gained’ ”, for the sailor will appear. “He will reason thus:

“ ‘I am innocent; I am poor; my Ourang-Outang is of great value . . . why should I lose it through idle apprehensions of danger? . . . The

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police are at fault. . . Above all, *I am known*. . . Should I avoid claiming a property of so great value, which it is known that I possess, I will render the animal, at least, liable to suspicion.' ”

A step is now heard on the stairs, for the

“front door of the house had been left open, and the visitor had entered, without ringing, and advanced several steps upon the staircase. Now, however, he seemed to hesitate. Presently we heard him descending.”

The visitor, however, changes his mind, remounts the stairs and raps on the door. “ ‘Come in!’ says Dupin, in a cheerful, hearty tone.

“A man entered. He was a sailor, evidently,—a tall, stout, and muscular-looking person, with a certain dare-devil expression of countenance, not altogether unprepossessing. His face, greatly sunburnt, was more than half hidden by whisker and *mustachio*. He had with him a huge oaken cudgel, but appeared to be otherwise unarmed. He bowed awkwardly, and bade us ‘good evening’ in French accents, which, although somewhat Neufchatelish, were still sufficiently indicative of a Parisian origin.

“ ‘Sit down, my friend,’ said Dupin, ‘I suppose you have come about the Ourang-Outang. Upon my word, I almost envy you your possession of him; a remarkably fine, and no doubt a valuable animal. How old do you suppose him to be?’ ”

“The sailor drew a long breath, with the air of a man relieved of some intolerable burden, and then replied, in an assured tone:

“ ‘I have no way of telling—but he can’t be more than four or five years old. Have you got him here?’ ”

Here Dupin says the creature is housed in a near-by stable, where it may be got the following morning, though he will be sorry to part with it. At this the sailor pronounces himself willing to pay a reward.

“ ‘Well,’ replies Dupin,

“ ‘. . . Let me think!—what should I have? Oh! I will tell you. My reward shall be this. You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue.’ ”

So saying, he walks quietly to the door, locks it and draws his pistol.

The blood rushes to the sailor’s face and he seems on the point of suffocating. Starting to his feet, he grasps his cudgel, then collapses into his chair, trembling, speechless.

“ ‘My friend,’ ” says Dupin, in a kind tone,

“ ‘you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. . . We mean you no harm

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whatever. . . I perfectly well know that you are innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue. . . You have done nothing which you could have avoided. . . You have no reason for concealment. On the other hand, you are bound by every principle of honor to confess all you know. An innocent man is now imprisoned, charged with that crime of which you can point out the perpetrator.' "

Thus reassured, the sailor speaks. He and a comrade had captured the Ourang in Borneo. The comrade dying, the creature became his. With great trouble, owing to its "intractable ferocity", he had brought it to Paris. There, he kept it carefully confined, recovering from a wound caused on shipboard, the result of running a splinter into its foot. His eventual design had been to sell the animal. But . . .

"Returning home from some sailors' frolic on the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room, into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined. Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet."

Thinking to cow the creature, the man seized his whip but the ape sprang from the room, rushed downstairs and gained the street by an open window.

"The Frenchman followed in despair; . . . the chase continued for a long time. The streets were profoundly quiet, as it was nearly three o'clock in the morning. In passing down an alley in the rear of the Rue Morgue, the fugitive's attention was arrested by a light gleaming from the open window of Madame L'Espanaye's chamber, in the fourth story of her house. Rushing to the building, it perceived the lightning-rod, clambered up . . . grasped the shutter, which was thrown fully back against the wall, and, by its means, swung itself directly upon the headboard of the bed."

The sailor, wont as he was to climbing ropes, soon followed the same road but at the height of the window, which lay far to his left,

"the most that he could accomplish was to reach over so as to obtain a glimpse of the interior of the room. . . Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, habited in their night clothes, had apparently been arranging some papers in the iron chest already mentioned, which had been wheeled into the middle of the room. It was open, and its contents lay

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beside it on the floor. The victims must have been sitting with their backs toward the window. . .

"As the sailor looked in, the gigantic animal had seized Madame L'Espanaye by the hair, (which was loose, as she had been combing it,) and was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. The daughter lay prostrate and motionless; she had swooned. The screams and struggles of the old lady (during which the hair was torn from her head) had the effect of changing the probably pacific purposes of the Ourang-Outang into those of wrath. With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body. The sight of blood inflamed its anger into phrenzy . . . it flew upon the body of the girl, and imbedded its fearful talons in her throat, retaining its grasp until she expired."

At this moment, however, the ape caught sight of its master, whereupon its frenzy instantly became fear. Conscious of deserving punishment and as though "desirous of concealing its bloody deeds", it leapt about in agitation, throwing down and breaking the furniture and dragging the bed from the bedstead.

"In conclusion, it seized first the corpse of the daughter, and thrust it up the chimney . . . then that of the old lady, which it immediately hurled through the window headlong."

All this time the sailor had uttered many "exclamations of horror and affright". These, "commingled with the fiendish jabberings of the brute," were the two voices which the party had heard from the stairs. Then, as the Ourang-Outang approached the window with its "mutilated burden", the sailor, aghast, slid hurriedly down the lightning-rod and hastened home. The animal must have escaped by the same route, closing the window as it passed through. "It was subsequently caught by the owner himself," adds the narrator, "who obtained for it a very large sum at the *Jardin des Plantes*." Dupin takes the results of his enquiries to the Police, and the innocent Le Bon is set free.

The Prefect of Police, however, shows some chagrin "at the turn" the affair takes and indulges in a sarcasm or two "about the propriety of every person minding his own business". Our detective story then ends with a derogatory reflection or so by Dupin on this official and the expression of his pleasure in defeating him "in his own castle'."

* * *

Swept on by this dramatic tale, we have not paused to comment as we proceeded.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

In *The Man of the Crowd*, as we saw, the mysterious and tragic figure of the *criminal* appears for the first time in Poe's work, while the crime itself remains hidden. With *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, however, the crime itself takes pride of place and is straightway presented in all its blood and horror. It is the mystery of the perpetrator which that infallible ratiocinator, Dupin, whose acquaintance we here make, is called on to solve.

Yet we should not too readily accept, at face value, the account Poe gives us of the crime, for the profounder meanings, in the unconscious, of the bloodthirsty crime on the L'Espanaye women, are no more readily comprehensible than were the sinister aspects of *The Man in the Crowd*, whose origins we were able to trace. Unlikely as they are, the events Poe chronicles in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* are not altogether beyond the bounds of probability and a huge ape might possibly escape, climb through an open window, surprise two defenceless women, strangle one and behead the other, and escape. Given the absence of witnesses, the police would certainly be nonplussed. But psychic determination is no less dominant than physical, although more subtle and difficult to trace, and all the possibilities we have enumerated do not explain why Poe, for his first detective story, should choose just this particular theme and elect, therein, to introduce Dupin, with his quasi-magical powers. Nor does their plausibility account for the universal spell this tale has cast over readers during the century which has elapsed since this horrible, strange tale, of the ape-murderer was written.

The fact is that this murder, pure murder as it were, gratifies the sadistic, aggressive instincts asleep in us all: instincts which civilisation represses and only allows in war, hunting or imaginative works. At the same time, however, this murder illustrates another theme, one as enduring and far more significant to the unconscious, as the analysis of neurotics and so-called normal people shows. This is the *primal scene*, which most infants have witnessed or overheard; one which leaves ineradicable traces in the unconscious. This primal scene is the coitus of the parents, or parent-substitutes, of the child. Adults grossly underrate the infant's capacity for observation and think it too small to observe or understand. Again, in many poor families, the child sleeps in the parent's room and is thus present during coitus, while the parents readily imagine the infant asleep! Its instincts, however, do not sleep! Strange though it seem to the adult, children, from the tenderest age, at eighteen months or even a year, can register impressions of coitus. But, as we remarked elsewhere, although these impressions are not understood at the time, the infant's

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ego being too undeveloped, what is certain is that significant memory-traces are laid down at this age and later reveal their presence in the dreams and phantasies yielded by the unconscious during analysis.

It is difficult, given our adult mental attitudes, to conceive how the brain, instincts and observation of an eighteen-month child function. But that it is capable of great achievements, that we know, for does it not, then, begin to talk and attach sounds to relevant objects, which even the most intelligent animal cannot do.

This observing of the sex-act, whether visually in daylight, or by the light of the bed-lamp or, again, aurally in the dark, doubtless represents one of the great lessons nature, at this time, reserves for the small child. This tiny human, be it remembered, belongs to a species remarkable for its sensuality, a species which no longer knows a mating season. Thus, throughout the year, from earliest infancy even, the child has ample occasion to observe the sex-act. Thus the sex instinct, already innate in this small and highly sexualised creature, is stimulated not only from within but from without. The child reacts with all the vitality of its new-formed instinctual urges to these external stimuli which life brings and, these, in their turn, reinforce that already deep, innate instinct. In any case it is a fact, that, after making due allowance for eating and excretory activities, both erotically tinged, nothing so much excites the child's interest, as every analysis shows, as anything connected with sex. In the outer world, too, nothing absorbs it more than its glimpses of the sex life of adults. This would be well enough, did the child stay a savage. Education, however, soon intervenes to restrain and often, stifle, the sexuality of the child. Nature's first initiation, freely bestowed on the child, in observing the amorous rites of adults, will be opposed by an upbringing—imposed by the very same adults—which condemns all its sexuality and interest in sex matters so that, at times, as with Poe, the child is doomed to perpetual impotence. But nature's work cannot altogether be obliterated; what was observed will remain and be carried into after life. In various forms impressions of parental coitus—or that of their substitutes—stored up from a tender age, are always part of every human being's heritage. Even should no reality-prototype for this scene exist, we find its place taken by a phylogenetic, atavistic phantasy, which the spectacle of mating dogs, for instance, may serve to awaken.

In Poe's case, there seems every reason to believe he did, in fact, observe the *primal scene*. Apart from the striking evidence which, as we shall see, his works provide, the life of two strolling players was hardly such as to enable their child to sleep in a separate room: thus, the

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precocious boy would have every opportunity, in the dark, to spy on his parent's movements. The reader will now see the solution: the murder of Mme. L'Espanaye by the ferocious ape represents, to the sex-charged unconscious, the sex act. Not by chance did most of the witnesses testify that the voices heard quarrelling behind the partition, as they ascended the stairs, were those of a man and a woman; namely, of the human pair. Further, the mother's severed head symbolises castration, that female castration which is so cardinal a phantasy of small boys. So too, her locks torn out by the roots and the other horrible mutilations of the old woman.

Here, let us recall a general characteristic of these infantile observations of coitus which invariably interpret the sex act as a violent attack on the woman. This concept, which Freud calls the *sadistic conception of coitus*, always appears in the anamnesis of every patient in analysis. It conforms to the pregenital stages of the libido when, as a rule, these observations took place and is the only interpretation open to the child—given its ignorance of semen and the vagina—of what seems to it like the blows and hurts it may, itself, have received. Nor is this idea, despite its onesidedness, altogether false. Penetration of the woman's body, by the penis, is not always pleasant to the woman, and to the virgin it is painful. What likens it to a murderous attack is that there, too, some object must penetrate the body. Actually, three purposes only determine penetration into the body: the ingestion of food or air, to live; absorption of poison or penetration by weapons to kill; and penetration by the erect penis for procreation. It need not, therefore, surprise us that these three forms of penetration should fuse and merge in the unconscious. The wish for children, in the phantasies of neurotics, often appears as fear of poisoning, while the fear of pointed objects, apart from its basis in reality, often represents fear of penetration by the penis.

Nor is this all. Originally, to the child, girl or boy, this penetration would seem to be effected by the anus, the only abdominal opening it knows. At this stage, too, the little boy endows all beings—and his mother—with a penis such as his own. Only later, when he discovers and, more or less accepts, the difference in sex, does he imagine that a necessary condition of intercourse is the castration of the woman. At this stage, it is a common idea that, in intercourse, the man castrates the woman.

Not content then, with penetrating Mme. L'Espanaye's body with the phallic razor, our Ourang-Outang scalps her and cuts off her head. We know, however, that head-hunting, so universally practised, is the

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classic substitute, in the unconscious, for castrating and preserving the enemy's penis.¹

* * *

This hypothesis is confirmed by another of Poe's tales, written not long after *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and under the same psychic influences. We refer to *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, to which Poe added the sub-title, "A Sequel to *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*".² This feeble tailpiece to his first detective story, narrates the mysterious murder of a perfumer's assistant in a spinney outside Paris, and was based on a crime then recently committed in New York. The corpse is discovered in the Seine; the Prefect of Police is, naturally, again nonplussed and once more Dupin solves the crime. As it happens, the girl has been raped before being murdered, and the criminal is eventually revealed as a young naval officer—a seaman again—as swarthy as was the owner of the Ourang-Outang. But while the Maltese sailor was "greatly sunburned", the new criminal has "a dark and swarthy complexion". May we not see, in this theme of the sailor-criminal or proxy in crime, apart from the universal symbolism of the ravishing of the sea-mother, already examined in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a carry-over from the sailor Henry Poe, the poet's elder brother, and the original source to him, for a time, of all heroic and amorous adventure? Indeed, so much so, that these adventures of Henry—or at least, the accounts he gave—were incorporated in the autobiography the young Edgar invented.

The reader will remember that when Edgar first lodged with Mrs. Clemm in 1831, his brother Henry was already there. Henry, though sick, was not yet dying. They lived, versified, and went about together and even, together, courted the same Kate Blakely.³

This fraternal intimacy, however, soon came to an end. Edgar reached Mrs. Clemm in March and Henry died on August 1st that year. The year after Edgar, then twenty-three, became enamoured of Mary Devereaux. We already know the story of their idyllic courtship and its stormy close.⁴ Poe's love affair ended, as similar and later adventures were to end, in a drunken bout which terrified the girl and made her break off relations.

¹ Cf. Marie Bonaparte, *Du Symbolisme des trophées de tête* (*The Symbolism of Head Trophies*), *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 1927, fasc. 4.

² *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt, A Sequel to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"*: *Snowden's Lady's Companion*, November, December, 1842; February 1843; 1845.

³ *Israfel*, pp. 319–320. Cf. also above, pages 65 and 80.

⁴ Cf. pages 68–70, 86.

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Nevertheless, if Poe can ever be said to have felt anything resembling true physical attraction for a woman, it was for Mary Devereaux. Such is the conclusion Hervey Allen draws from the study of Mary's diary,¹ while the fact that the only tale Poe wrote which mentions the physical act had a heroine named Marie, and a family name equally French, does nothing, assuredly, to refute it.

Moreover, we know from one of Poe's letters that *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* was written early in summer, 1842.² Now, it was in that year, in January, that Virginia had that first hæmorrhage of the lungs which struck him so deadly a blow by reviving buried and unconscious infantile memories of his mother's hæmoptyses. Other hæmorrhages were to follow. As a result, his sadistic impulses were constantly reactivated, while his continual efforts to repress them seriously undermined his already none too stable psychological balance and made him seek refuge in the "protection" of drink. "I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity," he wrote later of this period. "During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank—God only knows how often or how much."³

This was one form of flight from the sadistic impulses reactivated by Virginia's recurrent hæmorrhages. But there was also another—the "fugue". As Hervey Allen tells us,

"While Virginia was lying on what seemed her death-bed, probably at Coates Street in Philadelphia, Poe went on a spree and finally arrived in New-York, where he looked up Mary's husband and obtained her address".⁴

He then took the ferry for Jersey City, where Mary lived but, having forgotten her address, made several trips back and forth on the ferry-boat, wandering about the decks like a madman, till he found someone who could direct him to her house. We have already quoted Mary's own account of his more than strange behaviour when he reached it.⁵

A few days later, Mrs. Clemm, hastening to Jersey City from Philadelphia, with Mary's help at length found her Eddy wandering in

¹ *Israfel*, p. 336.

² Poe to Roberts, Philadelphia, June 4, 1842: "I have just completed a similar article, which I shall entitle *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*". (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 112.)

³ Poe to Eveleth, January 4th, 1848. op. cit., pp. 287-8.

⁴ *Israfel*, pp. 532-533.

⁵ Cf. page 106.

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the near-by woods. He had apparently been without food or shelter for some days and looked and, seemed, demented. She took him back to Philadelphia with her.

This "fugue" is variously reported as having occurred in June or early July, 1842, or again in April of the same year. Poe, after one of his "short absences", had returned to Graham's to find Griswold in his chair. Mary, herself, tells us that Poe's visit occurred "in Spring". Be that as it may, it seems certain that, throughout this time, with Virginia's hæmoptyses perpetually reactivating his terrible infantile past, what characterised this time was a need for alcohol on the one hand, or a "fugue" and return to Mary on the other—"Come rest in this bosom", as he made her sing!). Return to Mary would spell escape from the sado-necrophilist temptations aroused by Virginia but, on the other hand, Mary's proximity, fraught with temptations to sexuality, made him seek refuge in flight to the woods.

These sundry elements, we rediscover, in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, doubtless written in May;¹ probably, as we think, after rather than before the "fugue" to Jersey City. Might he not, too, have dreamt the nightmare of a girl's rape and murder in a thicket outside Paris while he, himself, wandered in the Jersey woods, crazed by thoughts of Virginia and Mary.

Mary's name is lent to the heroine of the tale and the murderer, the naval officer, is inspired with those sadistic passions which Edgar, had he not been doomed to impotence, might well have felt for Mary. But *Marie Rogêt* still more clearly reveals characteristics of Virginia:

"Marie . . . was the only daughter of the widow Estelle Rogêt. The father had died during the child's infancy, and from the period of his death, until within eighteen months before the assassination . . . the mother and daughter had dwelt together in the Rue Pavée-Saint André; Madame there keeping a *pension*, assisted by Marie."

Again, we find that Marie's corpse even shows signs of the hæmoptyses of Virginia for, when the body is taken from the Seine, the face is seen to be "suffused with dark blood, some of which issued from the mouth". Thus, faced by the dramatic events of his existence, Poe not only sought refuge in drink and "fugues", but in the fictions of artistic creation, where we still see them reflected though a century has passed.

There is, however, one particular detail in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* which leads us to understand its deepest meaning. Fictitious

¹ Cf. page 449, note 2.

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though this tragedy is, we are expressly told that it *parallels* an actual event which occurred in America: the murder of Mary Rogers of New York. The circumstances of the two tragedies, the real and fictitious, so Poe tells us, were strangely similar. Yet he heads his tale with the following quotation from Novalis:

“There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism.”¹

In other terms, we may read as follows: in place of the father’s “violation” of the mother, observed when a child, the only alternative left Poe, so to speak, was the inferior “rape” of his child-wife, Virginia. For Poe, doubtless, there was as great an emotional and determinant difference between the primary version of the first great tragedy in his life, in which his mother played the main part, and the subsequent version offered by life in shape of the cousin and child-wife Virginia, as there was between *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* as regards their artistic merit. For though Poe was thirty-three when Virginia’s first hæmoptyses began, he was barely two when his loved mother’s—which, doubtless, he linked with the genital bleedings he would surprise—were to leave their indelible stamp on the wax of his infant psyche.

* * *

We now find ourselves better equipped to consider the real identities of the different actors in the tragic events of the Rue Morgue.

First, however, we may ask what events in Poe’s life might have helped to resuscitate this theme of the murdered mother, before Virginia’s first hæmoptyses took place? To this we can give no sure answer. Two, however, of the external factors—there may have been others—which, at this time, helped the emergence of the “guilty father” theme, were his break with Burton in 1840 and the fact that, about the same time, (or at least from that of acquaintance with Graham and his wine-cellar), Poe again took heavily to drink. And alcohol, as we know, releases the aggressive elements in our instincts.

But to proceed to the problem of identifying the actors in this hidden drama which Dupin is called on to solve!

¹ Novalis. *Moralische Ansichten*. As quoted in *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 5, p.2.

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Had Dupin been a psycho-analyst, in addition to his gifts as detective, he might well have told Edgar, David's legitimate son that, not without reason, did his first chain of associations, which related to Chantilly, lead to a bad actor! But since Dupin was not an analyst, Chantilly remained merely Chantilly, as the ape remained an ape.

This ex-cobbler and unsuccessful tragedian, Chantilly, hissed and jeered off the stage and, at last, immolated by a critic as merciless as Poe, is as we saw, David, Edgar's father, who utterly vanished when his son was but eighteen months old. He who narrates the tale is Poe the artist, but Dupin is Poe the analyst and ratiocinator, who explains *post-facto* what the child Poe—here represented by the sailor-onlooker, the *voyeur* at the crime—saw and stored up in infancy, but did not understand.¹ Ignoring for the moment the female characters, let us turn to the core of the puzzle: who is represented by the ape?

When, it will be remembered, Dupin subtly expounds his inductions as regards the suppositious murder—while keeping his conclusions unrevealed—and links the undoubted strength and agility of the murderer with his strange and inhuman voice, the friend feels

“upon the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend—as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember”.

So, too, Poe himself must have felt regarding his own infantile, repressed memories of his parents' coitus.

Yet who were these “parents”? One thing seems sure and that is that this tale of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* was inspired by regression remoter than that dominated by John and Frances Allan—one which harked back to Elizabeth Arnold and her sex partner. He would have been far less likely to observe the love-making of the respectable John Allan, and his “Ma”, than that of poor strolling players.

Here, however, we find ourselves again confronted with the problem to which so much space was devoted in our chapter on *Loss of Breath*. Was the sole prototype of the Orang-Outang, the ravisher-murderer-castrator of the mother and embodiment of all the worst instincts in man, his father David, here split into two as the ridiculous, impotent actor and, again, as the mother's sadistic sexual attacker under cover of darkness; or was yet another figure superimposed on David's in the child's mind;

¹ The sailor remains invisible to the ape until the murders have been committed. So, too, invisibility, a prime attribute of the *voyeur*, is a characteristic of him who follows *The Man of the Crowd*.

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namely, that of Elizabeth Arnold's unknown lover—Rosalie's supposed father—whose letters the casket she inherited may have contained, which letters later passed to Edgar and, at last, were piously burnt by Muddy?¹ Both possibilities seem equally plausible here whereas, in *Loss of Breath*, we find especial stress laid on the theme of infidelity and letters.

But, here again, our view would favour the second hypothesis. The fact that letters appear in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* encourages that view. We read that, at the scene of the crime,

“a small iron safe was discovered under the *bed* (not under the bedstead). It was open, with the key still in the door. It had no contents beyond a few old letters, and other papers of little consequence.”

(Of very great consequence, we should substitute, were we to translate the manifest content of the phrase into terms of its latent content.) Later, the sailor-*voyeur*, the only witness of the crime, tells us the same thing:

“Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, habited in their night clothes, had apparently been arranging some papers in the iron chest already mentioned, which had been wheeled into the middle of the room. It was open, and its contents lay beside it on the floor.”

Nevertheless, there is a contradiction between these two passages, for *after* the crime, the letters and papers are *in* the coffer, whereas *before* it, the contents lie beside it on the floor. Yet neither the murderer, nor his victims, can have taken the pains to put the papers back into the box. Possibly we have here some indirect reference to the fate of Elizabeth Arnold's letters which, while she lived were *visible*, but were *shut up* in a casket, with her secret, when she died. Be that as it may, all things considered, it is because of these letters, which they have been unlucky enough to wish to read by lamp or candle-light at 3 a.m., that the two women are murdered. These letters, in the latent context that underlies the tale, are letters loaded with guilt.

But there is something else which supports our thesis that Poe's unconscious believed his mother unfaithful, a belief doubtless sustained by many an unconscious recollection. There is a repeated insistence on the secluded life led by Mme. L'Espanaye and her daughter; they saw no one and lived in the utmost retirement. No doubt we have here Edgar's wish-phantasy in regard to his mother; the wish of the child to keep all men away. Again, this phantasy is developed more substantially,

¹ See page 378, note 2.

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though still symbolic, in Poe's unwitting use of the *room* as symbol for woman.¹ Now, this room in which the murders took place, when the first witnesses arrive, is found to have the corridor door, trap-door, and all windows, hermetically sealed.

The only issue is the fireplace and its chimney is blocked by the daughter's corpse.

Yet, as in Edgar's infancy, some male has managed to force a way into this sealed enclosure. First, we have the mystery of the broken nail in one of the window frames, a piece of "furniture symbolism" which represents the castrated mother. Again, this window, like the female body after the sex act, shuts itself once the criminal has left, and the room is again hermetically sealed. Yet, what dangers did not the mother incur, by merely leaving her window open! And here, Mephisto's warning would hardly suffice to forearm women: it is not once the ring is on her finger that a woman should open her window or door, but never and in no circumstance! To the impotent Poe who, when a child, had seen his mother bleed and die after, doubtless, having seen her embraced by one or more men, coitus was as deadly to the woman as to the man, who risked castration by the "vagina dentata". Thus Mme. L'Espanaye committed two errors which cost her her life; she was sorting old letters and had left her window open. The autobiographical and symbolic significance of these details, which determined her murder, now clearly emerges.

And now one very significant detail, added to that of the letters and casket, reveals whom Poe, in his unconscious, deemed to be the violator-castrator-murderer of his mother. For the ape, contrasted in its brutal strength with the weakling Chantilly, by main force, has pushed the daughter's body, as far as it will go, up the chimney. Thus, if Mme. L'Espanaye represents the disparaged image of the old mother, (as with the heroine of *The Spectacles*),² Mlle. L'Espanaye, the daughter, clearly stands for Rosalie. Rosalie's body then, when found, was "quite warm", having been pushed head downwards up the chimney—in fact, into the child's position before birth—by this huge anthropoid ape. We have seen that the room stands for the mother's body and, by a similarly frequent symbolic transposition, the chimney will represent the maternal vagina, or rather *cloaca*—as anus and vagina are figured in infantile sexual

¹ This is a very widespread symbol. We find it in German, reflected in the frequently pejorative term *Frauenzimmer* (literally *woman-room*), as a synonym for *woman*.

² *The Spectacles*, sent to R. H. Horne, April 1844; *Broadway Journal*, II, 20.

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theories and survive in the unconscious. In thus ramming the girl up the chimney and, so firmly, that four or five men are needed to draw her out, the ape thus symbolically does something equivalent to implanting, by coitus, a child in the woman. This presentation of the sex act in the tale is, as it were, split into two scenes: the ape first symbolically penetrates and—by decapitation—castrates the old woman with the phallic razor: and the consequences of coitus are then depicted by the ramming of Mlle. L'Espanaye up the chimney, symbolising the mother's inner genital regions. The mother, in these two scenes, appears in different guises: in one, in human shape, as the old woman; in the other, as a symbolic room containing the fireplace-cloaca.

We already know, however, that Elizabeth Arnold's pregnancy with Rosalie gave rise to much suspicion. Who, demanded gossip, had put her in that condition; a question John Allan was to repeat with cruel insistence? And, in fact, it seems to be just this problem which Poe, in his turn, sets in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, that first of our modern detective novels. Dupin, venerable ancestor of Sherlock Holmes and the whole race of detectives was possibly merely created to solve, for Poe's unconscious, the riddle of who was his sister's father?

If that father was the unknown lover, the little boy may have seen him in his mother's arms, in the dim light of the shabby rooms Edgar would have shared on her tours. Small wonder that, thirty years later, he should feel "on the brink of remembrance" without being able to remember; "on the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend". Yet, in the unconscious, there were intimations enough to fill him with pride in the depths of his knowledge, compared with the fumbings of the police inspector, which father-figure he could now deride. Talk as he might, this Prefect of Police—another John Allan—of the crime that gave Rosalie birth, it was *he*, the little Edgar, who had actually seen it committed. The child *voyeur*, represented by the seaman in the tale, could then appear at the bar of Poe's adult intelligence in the double guise of Dupin the analyst, and his friend the narrator and scribe; it was he alone, though so young an eye-witness who, in fact, had seen Elizabeth Arnold's unlawful assailant and real father of Rosalie.

But the man's name, if our suspicion is correct, is not revealed, and no light is thrown on this lover. Nevertheless, he does appear as the fierce ape, embodying those aggressive and bestial instincts which, as primitively conceived by the child, dominate his always sadistic concept of the sex act. That the young Edgar, like all children, sensing in himself these same larval instincts, should have striven, from his own atavistic

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depths, to model himself on that wild and animal father, equally admired and condemned, is shown by this simple detail in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. When Dupin and the seaman meet, almost the first words the detective utters are:

"I suppose you have called about the Ourang-Outang. Upon my word, I almost envy you the possession of him; a remarkably fine, and no doubt a very valuable animal. How old do you suppose him to be?" . . .
"I have no way of telling," answers the sailor, "but he can't be more than four or five years old."

This is no place to consider whether or not an Orang-Outang of this age could have done all Poe attributes to it in the tale; it might be so, given their very great strength, even young. Of interest to us, however, is the fact that Poe here, though nothing demands it, gives it an age and, hat, the age of a growing child. Possibly Dupin, the analyst, when he 'envies' the sailor his possession of the "remarkably fine" young ape—apart from strategic reasons—also expresses Poe's regrets, as a reasoning adult, at losing his own original instincts; instincts still vivid in the pretty boy fostered by the Allans; instincts wild, untamed and early stimulated by his parents' embraces, before time had brought their repression. Happy indeed was the time when the small onlooker might still identify himself with that savagely potent "father"!

By the end of the tale, we see this repression at work. The good, unjustly suspected father, (the bank clerk Le Bon—possibly another surrogate of David?) is cleared and released, while the bad ape (perhaps as punishment, as in the pillory) is exposed to public gaze, in a cage, in the Jardin des Plantes. We are reminded of those questionings and verdicts of children, who split humanity into "good" and "bad", with no allowance for gradations.

* * *

Since 1842, when *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* first appeared, what numbers of detective novels have entertained, mystified, and thrilled successive generations of readers! In all, as Freud first pointed out to me, the unconscious roots of their interest, for us, lies in the fact that the trail the detective follows repeats, though transferred to other activities, the infant's original sexual investigations.

The foregoing pages have dealt with some of the elements of Poe's early sexual investigations as regards the mysterious and savage sexual attacks on the mother, whether called Frances, Elizabeth or, by transference, Virginia. We originally saw, in the first of this group of tales,

The Murders in the Rue Morgue

collectively described as “Tales of the Murdered Mother”, the tall and sinister figure of the “father” striding the London streets, who embodies, in *The Man of the Crowd*, the crime of a John Allan. But then the father-figure reverts to its originals, David Poe and, doubtless, Elizabeth Arnold’s unknown lover, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Finally, in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, written somewhat later, as an effect of the sudden onset of his wife’s hæmorrhages, we see the outlines of the criminal father (David Poe or unknown lover) shift on to those of the son. The criminal, a naval officer, recalls in sundry ways Henry, the poet’s brother, with whom Poe once identified himself when recording his imaginary autobiography. In *The Black Cat*, which will occupy us next, the transference seems complete and identification with the guilty, envied father is accomplished, (though only as fiction, be it said!). There Edgar Allan Poe will speak in first person in the criminal’s name, and triumphantly confess the crime he, himself, has committed.

CHAPTER XXXVII

The Black Cat¹

IN their moves from humble dwelling to dwelling, the little family of three—Muddy, Sissy and Eddy—had a fourth to share the difficulties of existence; Catterina, a handsome tortoiseshell cat. Catterina would seem to have joined the family during their time in Philadelphia (1838-1844). We find her mentioned twice in the lively letter Poe wrote Muddy, in April 1844, after reaching New York. He there says he misses both Muddy and Catterina and hopes they will soon be able to follow himself and Virginia to New York. Later, as Virginia's illness drew to its tragic close, Catterina, the reader will remember,² figured prominently in Mrs. Gove Nichols' account of her visit to Fordham. We repeat the passage:

"I saw her (Virginia) in her bed-chamber. Everything here was so neat, so purely clean, so scant and poverty-stricken, that I saw the poor sufferer with such a heart-ache as the poor feel for the poor.

"There was no clothing on the bed, which was only straw, but a snow-white counterpane and sheets. The weather was cold, and the sick lady had the dreadful chills that accompany the hectic fever of consumption. She lay in the straw bed, wrapped in her husband's great coat, with a large tortoise-shell cat in her bosom. The wonderful cat seemed conscious of her great usefulness. The coat and the cat were the sufferer's only means of warmth, except as her husband held her hands, and her mother her feet. Mrs. Clemm was passionately fond of her daughter, and her distress on account of her illness and poverty was dreadful to see."

This scene took place, we are told, sometime about December, 1845, but the intimacy between Virginia and Catterina must have been of long standing and, doubtless, had developed in earlier winters of poverty

¹ *The Black Cat: The Philadelphia United States Saturday Post*, August 19, 1843; 1845.

² Cf. pages 137 and 138.

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and cold. Probably, it was with some such scene before him, during the winter of 1842-1843—a winter especially cruel, when Poe's poverty was extreme, his wife spitting blood and he himself constantly tempted to drown his sorrows in drink—that he conceived this tale of *The Black Cat*.

* * *

"For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen," begins the hero of *The Black Cat*,

"I neither expect nor solicit belief. . . . But tomorrow I die, and to-day I would unburthen my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. . . . Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but Horror—to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects."

It is almost as though Poe had sensed the remote advent of psychoanalysis which, alone, has given us the means to reduce to a series of causes and effects, emanating in fact, as he himself says, from "homely and domestic happenings", the dreadful phantasms that haunted his life and art.

The doomed man continues:

"From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. . . . I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets."

Such, indeed, must have been the small Edgar, when he lived with the Allans, though we may somewhat doubt this statement as regards John Allan. Towards his "Ma", however, we may be sure he was "docile" in the extreme. We know, moreover, that he loved animals, for we see him, at fourteen, admiring his friend Robert Stanard's rabbits and pigeons,¹ and there is no record of cruelty to animals in the reminiscences of him as a boy. All this, together with our other knowledge, allows us to conclude that the sadistic components of his instincts must have been very early repressed, though they went on living in his unconscious in all their primitive strength, to blossom in the mighty shoots of his art.

¹ Cf. page 19.

Tales of the Mother

The doomed man then compares the love and faithfulness of animals with the "paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*".

"I married early," he continues,

"and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and *a cat* "

We know already that Poe, like the hero of this tale, married young, was fond of birds,¹ and shared with Muddy and Virginia a special preference for Catterina, the cat.

Like Catterina, the cat in the tale was "a remarkably large and beautiful animal" and, like it again, was possessed of astonishing sagacity. "In speaking of his intelligence," says the author,

"my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise."

Unlike Catterina, which was a tortoiseshell cat, this creature is "entirely black". Another and more cardinal difference is that the latter is a tom, and named Pluto. These divergences in sex and coat we shall treat of later.

"Pluto," the narrator continues,

" . . . was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets."

Let us leave for a moment the question whom this cat, bearing the name of the god who rules the underworld, represents: this cat which seems like a witch in disguise. Doubtless, certain readers will already have guessed its identity.

But the real drama is about to begin.

"Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character, through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse . . . I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my

¹ See page 153 for a description of Poe with his pet birds in the garden at Fordham.

The Black Cat

disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them." Pluto, however, is spared for a time. "But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto . . . began to experience the effects of my ill-temper."

For Poe, in truth, no evil could compare with alcohol. After each ungovernable excess he would return to Muddy to be nursed like a wayward, repentant child. Indeed, it was just his disastrous Washington spree,¹ before he began writing *The Black Cat*, which in all likelihood cost him the fulfilment of his dreams for the *Stylus* and that literary and material success which would have meant comfort for himself and his ailing wife.

Poe also knew, from experience, the power of drink to release phantasies of violence and sadistic attack. True, he did not carry them out, but they, therefore, haunted his unconscious with still greater intensity, as his tales clearly prove. Not by chance, did his most famous tales of crime appear just when the "Fiend Intemperance" had triumphantly re-entered his life. If he drank at this time, in flight from Virginia's hæmoptyses and the unconscious temptations her dying body aroused, nevertheless his drinking bouts always brought him back to those visions of blood and death which, from infancy, had dwelt in his soul. That fatal circle held him bound.

From it, he was rescued by his art. In the release and the catharsis of fiction, as "innocent" and as harmless as a motionless sleeper's nightmare, Poe, the sado-necrophilist, could do all that his principles forbid.

Thus, as against the docility and sweetness which, as we know from many witnesses, characterised Poe's domestic relations and even his treatment of Catterina, here is what the narrator of *The Black Cat* tells us of himself:

"One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and, deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket!"

¹ Cf. pages 108-110.

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The soul which here takes flight is not, despite the text, the "original" soul, but rather that part of the psyché which derives from education: in other words, its moralistic and inhibitory aspects. Actually, it is the psyche's deepest and truly "original" instinctual elements which, by the liberating effects of alcohol, take utter possession of the cat-destroyer's soul. The further significance of this hideous act, we shall see.

Next morning, the madman recovers his reason—like Poe, after each "fugue". He then "experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse", at what he describes as his "crime": ". . . but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched". For, in contrast with what happened to the author, the fictitious hero, from now on, is ruled by his sadistic impulses.

"In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain."

Yet though the cat moved about the house as before, it now flees its master's presence. The latter, at first, is grieved, then irritated by its behaviour and, throughout this time, continues to drink.

"And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such?"

No better description could be given of the counter-compulsions of instinct to the compulsions of morality; of those categorical imperatives with which instinct, in its revolt against society's constraints, opposes the categorical injunctions of morality so that, at times, criminals or delinquents commit their misdeeds or crimes, feeling they fulfil an imperative duty.¹ Since the instincts and their wild and savage components form the

¹ Cf. the case of Mme. Lefebvre, a wealthy bourgeoisie of Lille who, in 1926, from jealousy of her son, shot and killed her pregnant daughter-in-law. After the crime, she declared, with utter conviction, that she felt she was doing her duty. (Cf. the author's study, *Le cas de Mme. Lefebvre, Revue française de psychanalyse*, 1927, fasc. 1). Poe would have thought this woman, too, dominated by the spirit of perverseness.

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primitive subsoil of the human psyche Poe was right in asserting "perverse-ness"—here meant the compulsion to gratify the instincts—to be one of our prime, basic endowments, and to swear it by his similarly endowed soul.

As we know, however, the genital function was too repressed in Poe for us to find it openly expressed in his perversity. Poe's perverseness is never other than erotised aggression, whether directed outwards against others or inwards against himself: it is always sadism or masochism. In *The Imp of the Perverse*,¹ written some two years later than this tale and, doubtless, also between drinking bouts, the protagonist, by means of a poisoned candle, succeeds in killing a greybeard and sort of John Allan, whose heir he is. For some time he remains undetected, enjoying the fruits of his crime and his feeling of immunity, while convinced that the deed was done, not at the urge of the Imp of the Perverse but coldly, "rationally". Finally, however, the fatal Demon one day attacks him in the street, whereupon, moved by some irresistible impulse he cries, "I am safe—I am safe!" and, then, immediately confesses his crime to the crowd. The reader will recognise here that confessional urge which has attracted the notice of psychoanalysts² and which appears to be motivated by two apparently opposite trends: the pressure of conscience which demands punishment for our sins, and our instinctual urges towards criminal activities, which may even reach the exhibitionism we find here. Confessions of crime, we must remember, gratify the criminal's exhibitionist urges and we know how murderers like to boast of their deeds.³

Thus, if the urge to commit guilty and forbidden deeds will even borrow its compulsive character from the external morality primarily derived from those who taught us and, later, from our imperative *super-egos* or moral consciences, the confessional urge, which might, at first sight, seem only dictated by remorse and conscience, displays, in its turn, many of the instinctual features of the *id*, that primitive, bottomless reservoir of our most savage instincts. Thus, there is a constant interchange between these two psychic systems. Before,

¹ *The Imp of the Perverse*: *Graham's Magazine*, July 1845; *The Mayflower*, 1845.

² Cf. in particular Reik, *Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis* ('The Confessional Urge and the Need for Punishment'). Vienna: *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, 1925.

³ Worth recalling is the case of Kürten, the "vampire of Düsseldorf", who seemed to derive a voluptuous pleasure from confessing his worst atrocities to his judges. (Cf. pages 688–689, note 3).

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however, the hero of *The Black Cat*, which occupies us here, is seized in his turn, like that of *The Tell-Tale Heart* or *The Imp of the Perverse*, with the form of *perverseness* represented by the exhibitionist and self-punishing confessional urge, we shall first see him fall victim to the more primitive aspects of that same perversity which drives men to commit evil before they confess it; that evil which is the evil, first and foremost, done to others.

In our tale, that other is the black cat. "This spirit of perverseness" . . . continues the animal's master, "came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*" (evidently, here, through the pleasure, then remorse, of previously "vexing" others) "—to offer violence to its own nature" (his moral nature, that is, violated by instinct), "—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only"—(the familiar lure of forbidden fruit which, to Poe, primarily spelt sadistic aggression), "that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute." And now follows the account of his second *crime* against the cat.

"One morning, in cool blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt that it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God."

A son who had murdered his mother could hardly speak more strongly.

The next night, while he is asleep, the murderer's house catches fire. He, his wife and servant manage to escape. The house, however, is burnt to the ground and, with it, all his worldly wealth. "I am above the weakness," he assures us, "of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity." Yet, this is just what one feels he believes with all his being, and we shall see that he is right.

"On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected. . . I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas*

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relief upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic *cat*. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvellous. There was a rope about the animal's neck."

"When I first beheld this apparition . . . ," says the cat's murderer, "my wonder and my terror were extreme." He then reflects that, since the cat was hanged in the garden adjoining the house, which garden was then thronged by the sightseers to the fire, "the animal must have been cut from the tree" by one of them and the gruesome missile thrown through his bedroom-window to rouse him from sleep.

"The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it."

So the murderer strives to rationalise this terrifying miracle. It is not surprising that, despite these rationalisations, the apparition should make a "deep impression" on his fancy. "For months . . ." he says, "I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat. . . ."

Let us now interrupt our narrative to consider whom the cat represents. Though a tom and named Pluto, we should not be misled, for the Black Cat, as it were, is a *totem* of Poe's mother, conjured up by Catterina's presence round the house and bed of his consumptive mother-figure, Virginia. Even the metamorphosis of the tortoiseshell Catterina into the black Pluto bears this out, for his coat is "raven-hued" like the locks of the Lady Ligeia or Elizabeth Arnold.

We saw, once before, how Poe represented the mother, in totem guise, as the giant horse in *Metzengerstein*. Now, by what is more than mere coincidence, the cat, in its turn, expands to similar colossal dimensions, in the way that primitives magnify their ruling deities—deities the magnified projections of the male and female parent which more than retain the proportions of parent to child—in fact, multiply them. Just as the horse appeared hugely outlined in smoke on the sky over the blazing castle, so the giant cat is outlined on the wall of a similarly burnt dwelling. In each case the blaze must have a similar significance and represent both the expression of, and punishment for, that urethro-phallic eroticism which characterised the small boy's genital desire for his mother and for which he was punished. "The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair." Unconsciously, Poe here alludes to the loss of the mother-house of which, so early, he was bereaved, while the lost fortune perhaps, in part, sym-

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bolises the male potency of the poet, "swallowed up" in the catastrophe which cost him his mother. The only heritage Elizabeth Arnold left her despairing, grief-stricken son, was the magnified image of herself; an image which would haunt his art and existence.

To the reader, this identification of the mother with a tom cat, may seem somewhat forced. In its support, however, we would appeal to common speech and thought, where cat is a usual symbol for the female genital organs as, for instance, in the well-known French folk song:

"Mon père m'a donné un mari,
Mon Dieu! quel homme, quel petit homme!
Le chat l'a pris pour une souris . . ."¹

The sexual symbolism is unmistakable here, even to the non-analyst. The "little man" obviously represents the husband's penis, which is even likened to a mouse whose significance, as a phallic symbol, in the mouse-phobias we find so frequently in women, is well known. Per contra, the cat which wishes to eat it up, stands for the woman's genitals into which the penis disappears or, in other words, by which it is "devoured".

Moreover, the cat, like the female organ, has thick hair, exciting and sensuous to the touch. Where the man has a *penis*, the woman has a *cat*, and all the ways of this little feline are feminine in their grace and treachery, even though a claw, at any moment, may issue from the velvet paw.

Legend follows this universal symbolism in making the cat the familiar of witches. Witches are the projection, in myths, of the wicked mother, as the good fairy is that of the good mother; the mother here, by a stock device of the unconscious, being split into two figures, of which one embodies all her good, the other all her *evil*, qualities. The cat, the wicked or dangerous mother's familiar, appears in legend as though the latter's shadow, reflection or double.

We find an explicit allusion to this deep and ancient bond in the opening of *The Black Cat*, for the narrator, referring to Pluto's intelligence, informs us that his wife,

"who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise."

Here again, it is superstition which proves right as regards psychic reality.

¹ "My father gave me a husband; Heavens! what a man, what a little man! —The cat mistook him for a mouse. . ."

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In Poe's case, the reader may recall the two cats in *Loss of Breath* which, more drastic than Pluto, relieve Mr. Lacko'breath of part of his nose after bounding into the surgeon's garret "a la Catalini", as might a skilled dancer or the sylph-like Elizabeth Arnold.

Yet though a cat, male or female, may represent the female genitals, why did not Poe choose a female cat for his tale, given the constant presence of Catterina? Some further factor must have determined the choice of a Pluto, rather than a Proserpine, to symbolise the mother who continued to haunt him from the grave. This further factor, doubtless, was some lingering reminiscence of the "phallic mother" of those distant days when women, to little boys, were all endowed with the penis. Every small boy starts out believing that all creatures are identical and made in his own image, with all his attributes, including first and foremost the penis, an organ of prime importance by the titillations it evokes in urination and when stimulated sexually, which feelings are present at a very early age.¹ Masturbation in little boys, when discovered, is often repressed by threats that the member will be cut off, or by remarks which the child similarly interprets, thus instilling fears of damage to, and anxiety for, the cherished member. But it is the discovery that a whole class of beings—namely girls and women—are in fact and for ever deprived of penises, that gives the castration threat its actuality and full horror. And, indeed, many years pass before the little boy will accept this difference in the sexes and "believe his own eyes", so painful does he find its acceptation. Even when at last he does, he consoles himself by thinking that little girls grow penises in time, and goes on believing that grown women at least and, especially, his mother—are so endowed. When, however, that last line of defence must be abandoned and his mother appears as a castrated being and he realises that women, by way of the mother, once and for all prove him wrong, he revenges himself by hating and scorning women. Despite the sex attraction which later covers and, at times, submerges such feelings, all men, in the depths of their souls, feel more or less scorn of woman as a *castrated being*.

How great, then, would be this scorn, in the case of a man who was impotent? And impotent through fear of castration; castration not only of the woman but *by* her, too, by reason of the vagina conceived as the "vagina dentata"? Such would seem to have been Poe's case and it is *hatred*—hatred above all of the castrated and castrating mother,

¹ Cf. Freud, *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy*, op. cit., page 250, note.

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embodying both active and passive castration—from which the tale of *The Black Cat* most deeply derives.

Why, because of a *bite*—unusual in cats, which generally claw—does a demonic fury instantly possess Pluto's master, if not because it harks back to the *cloaca dentata*, which theme recurs so often in Poe's works? The mother has wounded her son's hand, (that common phallic symbol and masturbatory member), and the son replies by pulling out his pen-knife, that undramatic equivalent of the razor in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Seizing the mother-totem cat by the throat, he inflicts upon it the mutilation and symbolic castration for which he hates the mother and, thus, identifies himself with the omnipotent father, as we earlier saw, in the shape of an Orang-Outang.¹ This is the penalty he exacts: he "cuts" the mother but, instead of her throat, it is one of her eyes he cuts out. We know, however, from dreams and myths and, in especial, from the Œdipus myth to which we shall revert, how universally blinding is a castration symbol.

By degrees, Pluto's wound heals, but the socket of the lost eye presents "a frightful appearance". No less frightful and repulsive, to certain men, Poe doubtless among them, is the appearance or idea of the vulva which, unconsciously, is likened to some frightful wound, left from the severed penis. Thereafter, the terrified cat flees from its master as swiftly as, before, it had sought and attended him and that so assiduously, that his master had often found it difficult to prevent him following him through the streets. We have here a whole series of situations reversed, as often happens in dreams. It was Edgar who, as a child, must have followed his mother round the house and would have wished "to follow her through the streets". Also, whereas in the tale the injured cat flees from its tormentor, in fact, it was Poe who fled, terrified, from mutilated woman, who could mutilate him.

Doubtless, too, it is to rid himself of the sight of this injury to his victim, that its master decides to kill it. The deepest cause of the perverse fit which makes the drunkard commit his second crime is, primarily, horror of castration.

The latter's wild, inexplicable anger, however, which cost the cat first one eye and then its existence, is attributed in the tale to quite other causes. Before he has even cut out its eye, before even he is bitten, we read: "One night, returning home, much intoxicated . . . I fancied that the cat avoided my presence". And, later, when the injured cat flies

¹ Cf. pages 452-5.

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from its master "in extreme terror", and before "the spirit of *Perverseness*" comes into question, we find the following sentences:

"I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation."

Thus, at separate times and before each "crime", what causes this murderous irritation in the cat's owner, is the animal's *avoidance* of him, and its loss of affection. Surely, there is here a carry-over from the time when the small boy saw his increasing erotic demands inevitably repulsed by his mother. Such resultant resentment and anger often persists in the unconscious through life.

Thus there would be two causes for the "criminal's" irritation with his victim; one, manifest and admitted, the cat's lack of affection; the other, the deepest and that which pervades the tale, his horror of the animal's gouged-out eye. All this might thus be translated, in terms of the tale's latent content: Poe, in his sadistic-anal and already phallic phase when his mother died, must even then have hated her for repulsing his childish sexual advances. But soon after, his infantile sexuality foundered on the rock of his moralistic upbringing by John Allan and the usual castration threats.

Only then would he realise the difference between the sexes, and be forced to consider woman as a castrated being, this then evoking such terror as to determine his future impotence. This discovery that women and especially his mother, were castrated beings, made when under the care of the ailing Frances, must have been retrojected on the past and his real lost mother; that mother who, ever after, ruled his inner life. And the Black Cat is hated less, indeed, for avoiding its master, than for the "frightful appearance" of the mutilation it bears.

This, then, is the real reason why the cat must die. But why must it hang, rather than be put to death in some other manner? The answer is, in retribution for the crime the mother committed. In the manner in which the cat is punished, the mother may read the nature of her offence.

* * *

Another imaginative work, one of the most famous ever conceived, shows the mother similarly hanged. This is the key myth and story of *Œdipus*, borrowed by Freud to describe a universal complex in man. While *Œdipus*, in the myth, as the son-husband, puts out his eyes in punishment for his incest, Jocasta, the mother-wife, chooses to die by hanging.

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Though, however, from the early days of psycho-analysis, there was no difficulty in interpreting Œdipus's self-imposed punishment as symbolising castration, it was less clear to the psycho-analyst why Jocasta should choose this form of death.

This is no idle question. The kind of death people choose, whether as suicide for themselves, or in fiction for their heroes is never, in fact, decided by chance, but always rigidly determined by psychic factors. Let us now see whether *The Black Cat* may not finally help us to solve the problem posited by Jocasta's hanging.

That of the hung cat we have already answered in analysing *Loss of Breath*¹. There, the impotent hero, castrated of his symbolic breath, in effect, has his penis symbolically restored when he is hanged. Hanging, as we saw, is equated in the unconscious with the *rephallisation* of the victim, both because hanging is thought to determine ejaculation *in extremis* and because the suspended body, as *hanging* object, is equated with the penis. Thus, the hanged man, *in toto*, comes to represent a most important member, present in men but not in women.

Mr. Lacko'breath, the Black Cat, and Jocasta, are all three hanged. Mr. Lacko'breath's case is clear, for his hanging represents Poe's own wish-phantasy, that of regaining the penis and, thus, the sexual potency he lacked. But, as regards the Black Cat and Jocasta, the case is far less simple for it is not, now, the author of the tale or myth but the mother who is rephallised, by him, in this fashion. Nor must we forget that the Œdipus myth, like the *Black Cat*, are fictions created, visualised and conceived, entirely from a masculine viewpoint.²

But, it will be objected that it is no punishment to the woman to be thus presented with a penis, to which, as psycho-analysis shows, every woman, more or less, unconsciously aspires, nor even punishment from

¹ Cf. pages 393-5.

² It is my belief that certain myths were created by men and others by women. *The Sleeping Beauty* (*Dornröschen*), for instance, appears to belong to the latter category. In my opinion, this fairy story depicts the libidinal destiny of woman from infancy to defloration. The old spinning-woman who, in a remote corner of the castle, goes on plying her spinning wheel or distaff, despite the prohibition of the king who thus seeks to evade, though vainly, the fate the fairies have pronounced, would represent the phallic mother and moreover the double of the fairy Carabossa. Her distaff symbolizes the clitoris-penis which the little girl discovers that she, like the phallic mother, also possesses. The child playing with the distaff, which she has been forbidden to touch, is obviously masturbating (masturbation in little girls being generally clitoridic). The pricked finger is an

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the male standpoint, from which view this myth is conceived. For men were once boys and, whatever they may later feel in regard to the female organ, it was only with difficulty and under the growing pressure of reality that they came to abandon belief in the penis originally attributed to the mother.

Here lies the gist of the matter for when the creators of the Œdipus myth, or the author of *The Black Cat*, hang the mother and symbolically restore her penis, in some sort they satisfy a wish. But also they fulminate an indictment and show, by her grim and ironical fate—hanging—the crime she must expiate.

See, they seem to say, you are punished because you never had what I believed you had. And so you must mimic it in the supreme punishment of death!

Nor must we forget that this penis, represented by the hanged body, is limp and, as it were, dead. Would not this limpness then, of the hanged body, heap mockery on the mockery already implicit in this rephallisation of the woman? It is as though the son were saying to the mother: "Yes, you have a penis, but it is dead!" In Poe's case, given his impotence, this ultimate jibe might well be his talion on the mother.¹

Thus, the rephallisation of the mother, the proof of whose castration broke down the last walls behind which the son could entrench himself against fears of his own castration, comes to express the worst conceivable punishment for her. So, too, though thousands of years lie between them, the tale of *The Black Cat* may serve as exegesis on the venerable myth of Œdipus, King of Thebes.

In both inventions, castration, as we see, is represented by putting out eyes: the son's eyes in the myth, the mother's eyes in the tale. It is just the fact that, here, the female totem is ocularly castrated, which made it possible for us to retrace the path from the mother's castration to her

example of the common device of the *displacement* of castration from the genital organ to the hand which touches the genitals in masturbating. The sleep into which the child falls, doubtless represents the latency period during which childish masturbation must be repressed if the girl is to become a woman. Finally, the prince who finds his way to the Sleeping Beauty through brambles and thorns, which of themselves open before him, is the man who, in rupturing the hymen, awakes the woman to full erotic feeling which, for true adaptation to its function, must here become vaginal.

¹ In certain men with a phobia or simple aversion for weeping willows and other drooping trees, we find that the horror inspired by drooping branches is, in fact, displaced from horror of the penis at rest; thus of impotence and so of castration.

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rephallisation and, thereby, to understand at last the latent significance, wish-phantasy and talion-phantasy combined, which hanging the mother represents in the sons' minds.¹

* * *

" . . I could not," Pluto's murderer confesses at the point where we stopped—the outline of a cat having miraculously appeared on the wall—"rid myself of the phantasm of the cat"—which need not surprise us now we understand that it represents an immense mother-figure. The mother, however, refuses to be banished from the son's life, even in death. As we shall see, she returns yet again from Pluto's realm, summoned by the son's ineradicable longing.

"During this period," he continues, "there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse."—It was primarily, we should say, longing.

"I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place "

Thus, the suggestion of longing is confirmed.

Now the second act of the tragedy opens, its central figure being the second cat.

"One night as I sat, half stupified, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of Gin, or of Rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. . . It was a black cat—a very large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast."

¹ I am indebted to Freud for the understanding of these two points so essential to the context:

(a) the equating of the hanged man with a hanging object (i.e., the penis), which I have already used in analysing *Loss of Breath*;

(b) the way the son reproaches the mother for lacking a penis by imagining her hanged, which thus turns the whole of the mother's body into what that body should have but lacks; a penis—the hanging member.

Freud himself, in discussing *The Black Cat* with me, has thus completed the interpretation of the Œdipus myth by providing the explanation for one feature which remained obscure: Jocasta's hanging.

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A splotch, we should say, representing milk, both by its colour and position. A splotch, in fact, of that same symbolic whiteness, though here no more than a mark on the breast, which covered the whole of the body of the strange *Tekeli-li* discovered by Arthur Gordon Pym. As we observed, in analysing that tale, this denizen of the milky Southern Seas, in addition to its scarlet teeth and claws, symbolic of castration, had the head of a *cat*.

Another indirect proof—evidently accompanied by unconscious memories of suckling and its oral-erotic gratifications—that this theme is linked with the white-breasted cat, is testified by the place where it is discovered; a tavern, where one *drinks*, and where it is perched on a barrel of gin or rum. Here, clearly confessed, we have the links that bound Poe's dipsomania to the unconscious memories of, and pinings for, the time when he sucked at his mother's breast.

Pluto's owner is at first overjoyed to discover this re-embodiment of his victim and caresses the cat, which shows every sign of delight. At once, he offers to purchase it from the landlord who, however, "made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before". So, too, phantoms behave, suddenly emerging from the shadows where they do lurk.

Thus, restored to her son, the mother who fed him at her breast, resumes her plea. She proclaims, at once, that she suckled him as a babe, as proved by the milk-stain splotching her chest, and adds that she loved him passionately as a babe and, never, in those days, thrust him away. But whereas Pluto, the first cat—which doubtless represents the mother in the child's anal-sadistic and phallic stage—finally flees from its owner and so rouses his rage, the second and white-chested cat doubtless represents the mother at the child's oral stage and, as we shall see, will be an inseparable companion and remain glued to his side like a loving shade.

The cat then elects to accompany its new owner home, where it is soon domesticated and becomes "a great favorite" with his wife. Nevertheless, its new master confesses,

"I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but . . . its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed. By slow degrees, these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature . . . I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence."

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The secret of this horror, in which hate combines with disgust, immediately follows: "What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast," says the narrator—though, more truthfully, he might have said, "what *caused* my hatred"— "was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes". Thus, the chronology of events is respected, for the son is first aware of the mother's milk (the white mark on the cat's chest) and only later of the fact that it is castrated (has a missing eye). Similarly, and again in accord with Poe's life Pluto, for "several years", was on friendly terms with its master before it, too, suffered the loss of an eye. It is this missing eye which determines both cats' fates, and it is in vain that the second proffers its milk-stained breast in extenuation! The plea of the milk is powerless against the castration indictment; the white stain cannot prevail over the put-out eye. Nor is it wholly without reason that the cat's owner flies from its odious presence "as from the breath of a pestilence". In effect, castration, in the unconscious, may seem a sort of contamination by the woman which would infect the man with her "odiousness" as a castrated being.

The wife of our murderer, however, has no more reason to share her husband's dread of the cat, than one syphilitic to fear contagion by another. Both have the plague, and the cat's empty eye-socket, possibly because of their mutual misfortune, renders the cat yet dearer to the wife.

"Nevertheless," continues the narrator, "With my aversion to this cat . . . its partiality for myself seemed to increase"; *i.e.*, the mother who, once, nursed him at her bosom will go on loving him, however he resist, and continue to plead in her defence. It followed his footsteps, he says:

"with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast."

Thus the mother's tenderness for her child is once more inverted in the manner, familiar in dreams; it is the cat which treats its owner as the infant does its mother, establishing itself under her chair, her feet, on her knees or at her bosom. "I alone fed him," our narrator said earlier, speaking of Pluto and, this, correctly transposed, should read: "My mother alone fed me".

Yet every effort the mother makes, to recapture her son's affection,

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proves useless. Nothing, not even the memory of her care for him as a babe, at her breast, can lessen the horror she inspires as a castrated being. It is too late, the cat's eye is already out. "At such times," he says, "although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing . . . chiefly . . . by absolute *dread* of the beast."

The unfortunate wretch now tries to define this terror: "This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it". It is, in fact, an excellent definition of the castration-fear; "a physical evil" and yet, far more, given the vast unconscious psychic ramifications this fear implies and did imply, as we see, in Poe's psyche.

But now, we must ourselves admit that we have been carried away by this plea of milk, and the affection thus attributed to the son for this second embodiment of the mother. Something like a similar feeling of discomfort, an echo, as it were, of what the cat's owner felt so intensely, when pestered by its affection, should have warned us, earlier, that this tableau of motherly affection might conceal some dour mockery of the son's. But, under this mockery, as we shall see, something more specific is, in fact, mocked and that more bitterly; namely, this milk on which her plea rests. For we must remember that Elizabeth Arnold, the frail, consumptive actress, cannot have breast-fed her son abundantly or long. As a nursing Edgar, doubtless, would often suffer those pangs of hunger and thirst, and cravings for milk, which later inspired the vast blanched Polar background of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Thus, the white splotch on the second cat's breast represents as much an accusation-phantasy, as a wish. Moreover, in *The Black Cat* Poe, as we saw,¹ employs a disguise-mechanism familiar in dreams, that by which things are represented by their opposites, which process also determines mockery. To the grim mockery of rephallising the castrated mother, by hanging, we must now add the mockery which relactifies her dry breasts by attributing the large splotch of milk.

Yes, my mother was barely able to breast-feed me Poe announces by this deceptive and mocking splotch on the breast of the second one-eyed cat, and so I hate her for this also—even though the main resentment comes from the fact that women have no penis.

All these grievances find expression in this tale but, as it were, in dream form. When he speaks of the dread and horror the animal inspires, its owner confesses these feelings were heightened

¹ Cf. page 471.

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"by one of the merest chimæras it would be possible to conceive. My wife had called my attention, more than once, to the character of the mark of white hair, of which I have spoken . . . this mark, although large, had originally been very indefinite; but, by slow degrees . . . it had, at length, assumed a rigorous distinctness of outline. It was now the representation of an object that I shudder to name—and for this, above all, I loathed, and dreaded, and would have rid myself of the monster *had I dared*—it was now, I say, the image of a hideous—of a ghastly thing—of the GALLOWS. . . "

Thus, in the white patch that splotches the cat's breast, symbol of the first sensuous pleasure bestowed by mother on child, there appears, as though drawn in milk, the symbol of the criminal's future retribution: a punishment which, by the law of talion, is equal to that to which the mother was earlier subjected: hanging. The expiation will equal the crime—the criminal seems to swear—by the milk of his mother! And just as the castrated mother was rephallised in death—worst mockery of all—so, also, will be the impotent son in his turn, when he meets the same death. But, in neither case, will this rephallising be more real than the milk in the withered breasts of his consumptive mother. All in all, in the hangman's noose, only death remains for both. Here, we may again recall that this penis symbol of the hanged body represents the pendulent, limp and, therefore, dead penis.

The cat, however, which bears this fearful sign on its breast, manifests increased attachment to its owner, who feels "wretched beyond the wretchedness of mere Humanity. . . " "*A brute beast*," he cries, "to work out for *me*—for me a man, fashioned in the image of the High God"—*i.e.*, the Father, the male of males—"so much of insufferable woe! Alas! neither by day nor by night knew I the blessing of Rest any more!" Thus the mother, in this most horrible mockery of all, returns to haunt her terrified child in the very similitude of utmost affection, by sharing his nights. For, during the day, "the creature left me no moment alone", and, in the night

"I started, hourly, from dreams of unutterable fear, to find the hot breath of *the thing* upon my face, and its vast weight—an incarnate Night Mare that I had no power to shake off—incumbent eternally upon my *heart!*"

Thus, in this form of neurotic anxiety, unconscious memories of times spent as a child, in his mother's bed were to return to the repressed, the impotent Poe. These voluptuous sensations of body-heat and nurturing protection with others, more openly erotic, communicated by

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contact with the loved body necessarily reappear, as a result of the subsequent repression, in the form of morbid anxiety.

I am reminded here of what I was once told by my old nurse, a Corsican both devoted and primitive. One must never, she said, leave a baby alone in a room with a cat, for the cat will always seek the warmth of the baby's chest and the babe will be stifled. Again, on the backs of baptismal certificates, we find, among other things, important to note, generally pious in intent, the following notice: "The Church, which watches not only over the eternal salvation of its little ones, but also seeks to prolong their days, strictly prohibits mothers and nurses from allowing infants in their care to sleep in the same bed, owing to the many unfortunate accidents which often result from such imprudence".¹

The first of these warnings, that of my good nurse, must be but another form of the second, that of the Church, in which we see the mother, in the totem guise of the cat, animistically conceived by her primitive Corsican mind. That the word *nightmare* should, by derivation, be "a female spirit or monster supposed to beset people by night",² associated with those suffocating feelings characteristic of anxiety dreams, may again derive from a similar phantasy based on unconscious reminiscences of early contacts, in bed, with the warmth and softness and, at the same time, overpowering bulk of the mother's body. Be that as it may, the criminal in our tale feels that "beneath the pressure of torments such as these, the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed". Evil thoughts torment him and his moodiness increases "to hatred of all things and of all mankind". This curse of hate against the mother thus extends to the whole universe, but is soon withdrawn, however, to concentrate with redoubled force on its real object. Even before his first attack on Pluto, we saw that the drunkard had "suffered himself to use intemperate language" to his wife and, even, offer her "personal violence"; now,

¹ *Extract from the Baptismal Register* of the Diocese of Compiègne, March 8, 1918:

"L'Église, qui s'occupe avec sollicitude, non seulement du salut éternel de ses petits enfants, mais encore de la conservation de leurs jours, défend rigoureusement aux mères et aux nourrices de les faire coucher avec elles, à cause des accidents fâcheux auxquels elles les exposeront par cette imprudence".

² *A New English Dictionary*, ed. Sir James A. H. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908); the syllable *mare* is derived from the Germanic vocable *mar* meaning incubus or goblin. Cf. the French *cauchemar*, from *caucher* (Old French: to trample or press upon, from Latin *calcare*) and *mar* (Germanic: incubus; and the *langue d'oc* word *chaouche-viello*, also meaning nightmare, but literally: the old woman who presses. (Cf. Littré, article *cauchemar*.)

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speaking under the spell of the horror inspired by the second cat, to whose pleas he has turned a deaf ear, he says:

“from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas! was the usual and most patient of sufferers”.

Thus does the woman, prototype of the cat, reappear behind it. It need not, therefore, surprise us if, as we shall see, the blow intended for one strikes the other.

“One day she accompanied me, upon some humble household errand, into the cellar of the old building which our poverty compelled us to inhabit. The cat followed me down the steep stairs, and, nearly throwing me headlong, exasperated me to madness. Uplifting an axe, and forgetting, in my wrath, the childish dread which had hitherto stayed my hand, I aimed a blow at the animal which, of course, would have proved instantly fatal had it descended as I wished. But this blow was arrested by the hand of my wife. Goaded, by the interference, into a rage more than demoniacal, I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain. She fell dead upon the spot, without a groan.”

“This hideous murder accomplished”, the murderer forthwith sets himself “with entire deliberation, to the task of concealing the body. . .” He considers and rejects several possibilities, such as cutting the corpse into minute fragments and destroying them by fire, or digging a grave in the cellar, or casting the body in the well in the yard, or “packing it in a box . . . and so getting a porter to take it from the house”. Finally . . . he determines

“to wall it up in the cellar—as the monks of the middle ages are recorded to have walled up their victims”.

“For a purpose such as this the cellar was well adapted. Its walls were loosely constructed” . . . and the plaster was still moist and soft. “Moreover, in one of the walls was a projection, caused by a false chimney, or fireplace, that had been filled up, and made to resemble the rest of the cellar.”

Thereupon the murderer dislodges the bricks, props the body, standing, against the inner wall, re-lays the bricks and, preparing a plaster “which could not be distinguished from the old”, carefully covers the new brickwork. Then, with minutest care, he picks up all the rubbish on the floor and, finally, feels satisfied all is right.

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"The wall did not present the slightest appearance of having been disturbed. . . I looked round triumphantly, and said to myself, 'Here at least, then, my labor has not been in vain!'"

In other words, translated into terms of the unconscious: *At last the woman, that castrated monster, will never reappear. The castration-fear is walled up forever.*

That this is the underlying idea, what follows confirms:

"My next step was to look for the beast which had been the cause of so much wretchedness; for I had, at length, firmly resolved to put it to death".

The animal, however, cannot be found. Possibly it had fled in alarm from his violence. In any case,

"It is impossible to describe, or to imagine, the deep, the blissful sense of relief which the absence of the detested creature occasioned in my bosom. It did not make its appearance during the night—and thus for one night at least, since its introduction into the house, I soundly and tranquilly slept; aye, *slept* even with the burden of murder upon my soul!"

So might a man feel who imagined that, once and for all, he had rid himself of the dread of castration.

We may compare this indifference, this apparent lack of remorse after his "crime" of murdering his wife, with his feelings when hanging Pluto.

"I . . . hung it," he says: "with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart . . ."

Above we see only the pure hate-affect, though with Pluto the hate still mingled with filial affection. But, all through this tale, there is revealed a sort of increasingly open and undisguised hatred, if not horror, of woman, that castrated monstrosity.

"The second and the third day passed, and still my tormentor come not. Once again I breathed as a free man. The monster, in terror, had fled the premises forever! I should behold it no more! My happiness was supreme! The guilt of my dark deed disturbed me but little. Some few inquiries had been made. . . Even a search had been instituted—but of course nothing was to be discovered."

Nevertheless, on the fourth day of the murder, police enter the house and rigorously investigate the premises.

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"At length, for the third or fourth time, they descended into the cellar. . . My heart beat calmly. . . I walked the cellar from end to end . . . and roamed easily to and fro."

Then, as the police, finally satisfied, give up their search and prepare to depart, the "glee" in the murderer's heart is "too strong to be restrained". He burns to say "if but one word, by way of triumph" and bursts out, "as the party ascended the steps". . .

"Gentlemen! . . . I delight to have allayed your suspicions. I wish you all health, and a little more courtesy. By the bye, gentlemen . . . this is . . . an *excellently* well constructed house. These walls—are you going, gentlemen?—these walls are solidly put together."

And now, led on by the Imp of the Perverse, in a confessional urge, both exhibitionist and self-punishing, the murderer, "through the mere phrenzy of bravado", raps heavily, with a cane,

"upon that very portion of the brick-work behind which stood the corpse of the wife of my bosom"

The result is appalling.

"No sooner had the reverberation of my blows sunk into silence, than I was answered by a voice from within the tomb!—by a cry, at first muffled and broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud, and continuous scream . . . a howl—a wailing shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of hell. . . Swooning, I staggered to the opposite wall. For one instant the party upon the stairs remained motionless, through extremity of terror and of awe. In the next, a dozen stout arms were toiling at the wall. It fell bodily. The corpse, already greatly decayed and clotted with gore, stood erect before the eyes of the spectators. Upon its head, with red extended mouth and solitary eye of fire, sat the hideous beast whose craft had seduced me into murder, and whose informing voice had consigned me to the hangman. I had walled the monster up within the tomb!"

Thus the tomb, under the double urge of his remorse and his compulsion to exhibit the crime, opens and spews forth, to the son's horrified eyes, the dead mother's corpse crowned with this multiple castration-image. For now the dreadful cat is not content merely to display its hideous eyeless socket, but opens and distends its menacing jaws, red as the vagina-wound cut into the woman's body. Further, it is immured in a chimney—that same symbolic recess in which was thrust Mlle. L'Espanaye's body

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—which recess opens before the murderer's eyes, as though a horrible gaping wound in the house's body. Per contra, the grim and horrible mockery, so evident in this tale, determines that the wife's body, in its entirety—as earlier, that of her double Pluto—is represented, not as hanged but as “erect”, in her tomb-chimney. This erect posture in which the murderer buries his wife, after splitting her skull with an axe—equivalent to castration and counterpart to the pen-knife excision of the cat's eye—is also a sort of counterpart to the hanging of Pluto; yet another mockery in the form of rephallisation. That it is never anything more than a gruesome mockery, we clearly see from the fact that, even in the tomb, the great crime of which she remains accused is castration, as is obvious from the effigy with which she is finally crowned; the one-eyed cat with distended jaws.

Such is this tale which revolves round phantasies of woman as a castrated being, a tale so much the more moving and impressive in that this theme, naturally, is never expressed. Many of our readers, if they have not already thrown aside this book will, doubtless, not have followed us into these caves of the unconscious, ever darker and more menacing than the cellar in which the narrator walls up his wife and cat. Poe also, no doubt, would never have followed us there, for the latent content of his tale lay altogether too far from consciousness, owing to the over-stern repression, in his childhood, of anything to do with sex. Yet, no more than a dreamer's denials invalidate the latent content of his dreams, which underlies their manifest content and which psycho-analysis uncovers, would Poe's denials invalidate the deepest meaning of this tale.

* * *

As we saw, the castration fear, embodied in woman as the castrated being, lies at the core of the tale of *The Black Cat*. Nevertheless, all the primitive anxieties of the child, which often remain those of the adult seem, as by design, to be gathered here, as though to express the utmost extreme of anxiety.

In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*¹ Freud sets forth in chronological sequence the development of the primary forms of anxiety in the child. Each such anxiety state corresponds to a specific danger which the child is called on to meet. First to appear is the anxiety connected with birth (*birth-anxiety*), which anxiety of physiological origin derives from the actual experiences of the foetus in its egress at birth—the cardiac

¹ Op. cit., page 312, note 1.

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disturbances and semi-asphyxia that provide the pattern from which all later anxiety derives. This is succeeded by *separation-anxiety* in various forms, the most purely physiological being that connected with weaning, though every separation from the mother rouses fears of losing her love and protection, with the concomitant anxiety that inspires. When the child is somewhat older, we find a third anxiety, fear of castration (*castration-anxiety*), which determines the repression of the child's sexuality—masturbation and Oedipus complex included. This dread of the worst imaginable mutilation, the loss of the penis, which nothing could ever replace—unlike the womb which the warm bed replaces, or milk and its substitutes of warm pap and food—this first anxiety-fraught realisation of a definitive and irremediable threat to the child's most treasured organ, represents its first great fear in relation to the community and, more even than separation anxiety, determines what its future moral code will be. The danger of castration, little as it need be feared nowadays, doubtless once existed in prehistoric times. Then the father of the primal horde, originator of our earliest morals, would doubtless have thought little of killing or castrating his rebellious sons when they coveted his females. The fourth type of anxiety, *fear of conscience*, directly derives from the preceding type, by way of the child's introjection of those it will think of as potential castrators, which also includes the prohibiting and morality-enforcing mother. Thus, the moral injunctions of the child's elders are internalised in its psyche, and survive to become the moral conscience of man. The child, the man, are now moral beings, who tremble at the reproaches of this conscience. Finally and last to appear, since the unconscious knows it not, and it is only comprehensible to the *ego*, is fear of death or *death-anxiety*. Now, the full-fledged ego, having learnt to comprehend the possibility of death, begins to dread its own annihilation. Happily, for most, the unconscious comes to the rescue by projecting its inner conviction of its own immortality beyond the bounds of time and space.

All these types of anxiety seem here present, crystallised round the main castration fear which dominates this tale, much in the way that the one-eyed cat dominates the cleft skull of the murdered wife. Even birth-anxiety is present though, as it were, inverted and directed, as by the law of talion, against the mother who inflicted it on the child; namely, the theme of the cellar and chimney in which she is walled up while, in the motif of the white splotch on the cat's breast, we see a reminiscence of both weaning-anxiety and separation-anxiety. Deriving from the main castration-anxiety theme, we see the fear of conscience (anxiety arising from

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the sense of guilt), which drives the criminal to confess his crime. Finally, with the gallows theme, we see death-anxiety, or fear of death.

All these fears, however, remain subordinate to the main theme of fear of castration, with which all are closely interwoven. The cat with the white breast has also a missing eye; hanging represents not only death, but rephallisation; the urge to confess leads to the discovery of a corpse surmounted by an effigy of castration; even the cellar and tomb, and the gaping aperture of the chimney, recall the dread cloaca of the mother.

* * *

Other tales by Poe also express, though in different and less aggressive fashion, regret for the missing maternal penis, with reproach for its loss. First among these, strange though it seem, is *The Purloined Letter*.¹

The reader will remember that, in this story, the Queen of France, like Elizabeth Arnold, is in possession of dangerous and secret letters, whose writer is unknown. A wicked minister, seeking a political advantage and to strengthen his power, steals one of these letters under the Queen's eyes, which she is unable to prevent owing to the King's presence. This letter must at all costs be recovered. Every attempt by the police fails. Fortunately Dupin is at hand. Wearing dark spectacles with which he can look about him, while his own eyes are concealed, he makes an excuse to call on the minister, and discovers the letter openly displayed in a card-rack, hung "from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece".

By a further subterfuge, he possesses himself of the compromising letter and leaves a similar one in its place. The Queen, who will have the original restored to her, is saved.

Let us first note that this letter, very symbol of the maternal penis, also "hangs" over the fireplace, in the same manner as the female penis, if it existed, would be hung over the cloaca which is here represented—as in the foregoing tales—by the general symbol of fireplace or chimney. We have here, in fact, what is almost an anatomical chart, from which not even the clitoris (or brass knob) is omitted. Something very different, however, should be hanging from that body!

The struggle between Dupin and the minister who once did Dupin an "ill turn"—a struggle in which the latter is victorious—represents, in effect, the Œdipal struggle between father and son, though on an archaic, pregenital and phallic level, to seize possession, not of the mother herself, but of a part; namely, her penis.

¹ *The Purloined Letter: The Gift*, 1845.

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We have here an illustration of that "partial love" and desire, not for the whole of the loved being but for an organ, which characterises one stage of infantile libidinal development.¹

Yet though the minister, impressive father-figure and "man of genius" as he is, is outwitted by the ratiocinatory and so more brilliant son, he presents one outstanding characteristic which recalls that very "son" for he, too, is a poet! He is a composite figure, combining characteristics of the two "wicked" fathers; first of Elizabeth Arnold's unknown lover, her castrator in the child's eyes, and then of John Allan.

For did not John Allan, too, appear to the child as the ravisher castrator of a woman, Frances, Edgar's beloved and ailing "Ma"? More still, had he not impugned his true mother's virtue and injured her reputation, as the blackmailing minister planned to do with the Queen's?

The minister also reminds us of John Allan by his unscrupulous ambition. And it was John Allan again, who, to Poe as a child, represented that "*monstrum horrendum*—an unprincipled man of genius", not far removed from the "criminal" of "vast intelligence" figured in the Man of the Crowd. So does the father often appear to the small boy, at once admired and hated.

Most striking of all, the minister exhibits Poe's outstanding feature, his poetic gift. And here Poe, in fact, identifies himself with the hated though admired father by that same gift of identification whose praises he sings in *The Purloined Letter* as being the one, supremely effective way of penetrating another's thoughts and feelings.

Poe, impotent and a poet, could never so wholly identify himself with the Orang-Outang in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, for there the father conquers the mother only by reason of his overwhelming strength. But, in his unconscious, Poe could achieve this with the minister for, though the latter, once more, triumphs by superior strength, this time it is of the intellect.

As to the King whom the Queen deceives, he must again be David Poe, Elizabeth's husband. Small wonder that Dupin, embodying the son, should declare his "political sympathies" with the lady! Finally, in return for a cheque of 50,000 francs, leaving to the Prefect of Police the fabulous reward, Dupin restores the woman her symbolic letter or missing penis. Thus, once more, we meet the equation gold = penis. The mother gives her son gold in exchange for the penis he restores.

¹ Cf. Abraham, *A Short Study of the Development of the Libido*. Op. cit., page 219, note 1.

The Black Cat

So too, in *The Gold Bug*, the treasure would seem to be bestowed by the mother, on the son, in return for the penis he restores to her. In our analysis of the tale it was too soon to emphasize the equivalence gold=penis: the point had not been reached at which we could offer an explanation. But now that we know the unconscious significance of the hanging-theme, we will recall the strange means devised by Captain Kidd to lead to his treasure. A plumb-line, *hung* through a hollow eye-socket, gives the position from which measurements should be made to reveal its presence. This is, indeed, strangely reminiscent of the gouged-out eye, symbolising castration, and the hanging theme, symbolising rephallisation. Both relate to the dead mother, whose skull thus, clearly, guards the treasure.

This theme of the castrated mother, so familiar to infantile ways of thinking and the unconscious throughout life, though far removed from consciousness and adult ways of thought, is thus found at the root of some of Poe's best-known tales.

* * *

It is time, however, to leave these tales which revolve round so many avatars of the mother. As was to be expected, in almost all the tales we have so far analysed, the son's relation to the mother is the main theme. Nevertheless, in some—as in the Marchese Mentoni on his palace steps, old Berlfitzing in his castle, or Mr. Windenough and the surgeon in *Loss of Breath*—we already catch fleeting glimpses of the father. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the father, killer and castrator, as the anthropoid ape is, even, the main character. But it is in *The Man of the Crowd* that, for the first time in Poe's work, the father's figure fills the stage in all his tragic grandeur. Even the mother and victim remains hid in the mystery shrouding the crime. Indeed, we might well be asked why we included this tale in the "Tales of the Mother" at all, were it not that the deeper logic of Poe's inspiration determined that place, since its main theme, in fact, is the father's relation *to the mother*.

The tales which now remain to be studied are almost all variants on another main theme; that of the son's relation to the father. We shall now see these two protagonists at grips; hate being uppermost first, then love.

BOOK III

THE TALES

Tales of the Father

Tales of
Revolt Against The Father

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The Tell-Tale Heart¹

"TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why *will* you say that I am mad?" begins the hero of *The Tell-Tale Heart* who, like his fellows in *The Black Cat* and *The Imp of the Perverse*, writes from behind prison bars, where his crime has consigned him.

"The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story."

Thus the narrator—whom Poe evidently wishes to show as mad or, at least, the victim of the Imp of the Perverse—begins by denying his madness like the "logical" lunatic he is.

"It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night."

The nature of this obsessional thought will soon appear.

"Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire."

This strangely resembles the representation, by its opposite, of Poe's own relation to his foster-father, John Allan! But let us see the *motive* our narrator assigns for his deed.

"I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever."

¹ *The Tell-Tale Heart: The Pioneer*, January, 1843; *Broadway Journal*, II, 7.

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This eye, filmed over, if only in part, permitting of dim or oblique vision, corresponds to an excised eye and so brings us back to the main motif in *The Black Cat*. All in all, the old man must be killed for the same reason as the cats. Here, however, the murder is premeditated, as in *The Imp of the Perverse* where, again, the victim is the father; there, it was for gold but, here, to annihilate the filmed eye.

“You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work!”

For the father, indeed, is to be feared and needs a cautious approach!

“I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. . . . I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man’s sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. . . . And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked)—I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights . . . but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.”

Here we see the son clearly outwitting the father in caution and astuteness! Even as we watch him enter the room, each morn, with friendly greeting, we seem to see the small Edgar as he visited his waking “Pa”, calling him by “name” and asking had he “passed the night well?” For so children must often do, compelled as they are to be affectionate and behave, though recent punishments may inspire quite different feelings.

“Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night, had I *felt* the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even

The Tell-Tale Heart

to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

“I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out—‘Who’s there?’”

Thus the adversaries are opposed; the eyes of the son, in the dark, being fixed on the menaced father.

“I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed, listening;—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.”

The old man’s increasing terror is then described and the tale continues:

“When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern . . . until, at length, a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye”.

“It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man’s face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.”

We are not told whether it is with his good or clouded eye that the old man perceives the ray which shoots into the dark room, nor is it ever made clear exactly how much he sees with his “vulture eye”. Whatever the case, the ray, thin as a spider’s thread, striking the offending eye, is responsible for an amazing reaction:

“ . . . have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses?”

he says, almost as though a paranoiac justifying his auditory hallucinations—and, continuing;

“ . . . now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew *that* sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man’s heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.”

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The murderer, however, restrains himself and remains motionless, his ray still fixed on that eye, while the "hellish tattoo" of the old man's heart goes on increasing. Meanwhile, his own terror rises to "uncontrollable" heights, as . . .

"... the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more."

The murderer then describes his "wise precautions" to conceal the body, as giving proof of his sound reason.

"The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

"I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!"

Now, however, it is four a.m., and knocks are heard at the street door. "A shriek had been heard by a neighbour" and the police have appeared, to investigate.

The murderer, nevertheless, is wholly at ease. "The shriek," he said, was his own in a dream. "The old man . . . was absent in the country . . ." And now, worthy precursor of the murderer in *The Black Cat*, (evidently written after *The Tell-Tale Heart*), he leads his visitors through the house and bids them search, and search well.

"I led them, at length, to *his* chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them *here* to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim."

The Tell-Tale Heart

This anticipates the murderer in *The Black Cat*, who raps on the cellar wall, both being reminiscent of those murderers who haunt the scene of their crime.

As might be expected, the victim, from the depths of his tomb, takes up the challenge. The statue on the Commander's tomb accepts the invitation of Don Juan and turns up at his feast. The walled-in cat shrieks out. And now the old man, whose heart beats so hellishly, *also* responds in his way.

"The officers were satisfied . . . They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears . . ."

The ringing increases—"until, at length, I found that the noise was *not* within my ears". The auditory hallucination is thus re-established.

"No doubt I now grew *very* pale—but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was a *low, dull quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton*. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose . . ."

And now the poor wretch makes ever more desperate efforts to drown the increasing noise. In vain he paces heavily to and fro, or grates his chair on the boards: the sound

"grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they *knew!*—they were making a mockery of my horror!"

Whereupon, possessed by this illusion and no longer able to bear their derision, the murderer cries:

"Villains! . . . dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks! here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

Such is *The Tell-Tale Heart*, possibly the most shorn of trimmings of Poe's tales and thus, possibly, one that is nearest to our "modern" taste. Among Poe's works, it stands like a faint precursor of that great parricidal epic which is Dostoevsky's¹ opus.

* * *

¹ FREUD: *Dostoevsky and Parricide. International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1945, I-8: *Dostojewski und die Vatermordung*, 1928. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIV.

Tales of the Father

It has been said¹ that the composition of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, to which Poe refers in a letter dated December 1842,² was doubtless stimulated by his severe heart attack, towards the summer of that year, after returning from Saratoga Springs. Possibly, it was this—according to Hervey Allen, Poe's third serious heart attack since the first, in 1834-35³—which furnished the adventitious cause for Poe's choice of just these anguished heart-beats to express the deep and buried complexes with which we shall now deal. The same device, also, was to serve him later, when his heart condition grew still worse, to express the weariness of living, in his poem *For Annie*.⁴ This explanation, however, far from exhausts all that *The Tell-Tale Heart* reveals.

Actually, we know, difficult as it may be for our conscious mental processes to grasp, that the functions of organs are not represented, in the unconscious, in a manner proportionate to the vital importance of each. The heart-beat, for instance, is so vitally important that, if it stops, death ensues. One might, therefore, imagine that the heart's activity would be extensively reflected in the psyche. This is not, however, the case; the beating of the heart no more disturbs the unconscious than do the rhythmic movements of the thorax. Both belong to those vegetative activities of organic functions which ordinarily do not concern the psychic unconscious.

Should, however, some organic disturbance suddenly disturb one or other of these important organs—or a conversion neurosis of hysterical or hypochondriac origin—we are likely to find them become a main source of anxiety. When this happens, however, it is never due to the organ as such and its function, but to the libidinal charge which invests it. Such organs then represent, apart from their proper function, that of the whole organism's libidinal function, now largely "displaced" upon them. In psycho-neurotic disturbances less severe than the complete narcissistic regression that determines hypochondria, the libidinally hyper-cathected

¹ *Israfel*, p. 567.

² Lowell to Poe, Boston, December 17, 1842. (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 125.)

³ *Israfel*, p. 540.

⁴

"The moaning and groaning,
The sighing and sobbing,
Are quieted now,
With that horrible throbbing
At heart: — ah that horrible,
Horrible throbbing!

(Cf. pages 180-3.)

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and disturbed organ may even serve to express the subjects' object relations to other beings.

So with Poe's story of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. As already noted, the murdered old man resembles John Allan in several ways, even to the symptom of the thudding heart. Did not his first attack of dropsy occur in England, in 1820: which illness, worsening with age, in 1834, ended his life? The reader will recall Edgar's last meeting with his foster-father and the cane—attribute of his disease—which the latter brandished against this intruder into his once home. His fear of the pounding heart in the murdered old man's breast thus, doubtless, directly derives from the oppressed, labouring and dropsical heart of the Scotch merchant. With that heart, as a result of buried complexes we shall study—and by that identification with the father habitual with sons—Poe later, and unconsciously, identified his own neurotic, alcoholic heart.

Yet the mere fact that John Allan suffered from dropsy does not account for the whole content of this anxiety-fraught tale. To understand the deeper motives which inspire man to dream or artists to create, we must grasp, in their plenitude, all the primitive, vital instincts which throng the unconscious.

We already saw, as regards *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Man of the Crowd*, that the child's sexual instincts awake much earlier than is deemed by adults. At an unbelievably early age, the child already possesses larval instinctual mechanisms which allow it to store up impressions of adult sex acts performed in its presence. That Poe, as a child, was present at such times, when sharing the room of his actress mother, the crime of the ape is almost certain testimony. For that very same crime, shrouded in London fog, those fogs among which Frances Allan acquired her mysterious illness, the *Man of the Crowd* is described as "type and genius of deep crime." For, to the child, at a time when coitus seems purely sadistic, the sex attack on the mother is the prototype of all crime.

Even though, when the child is small, adults do not always conceal themselves in the sex act, a time comes when they protect themselves from its eyes by what they imagine the impenetrable barrier of dark, so vividly described in *The Tell-Tale Heart* as, "pitch"-like. This darkness is indeed the preferred setting for the coitus of civilised man, as though it were something disapproved by society.

Nevertheless, alert as they are, the child's sex instincts continue to perceive and record, though in the dark. What it saw earlier may contribute to this but, even without sight, hearing would suffice. For, in

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effect, coitus has its own sounds, rhythmic movements and precipitate breath, combined with an accelerated heart beat. And even though these heart-beats may be imperceptible from a distance, the panting which accompanies them and characterises the sex-act, is strangely audible to infant ears, straining to every sound in the still darkness.

Thus, it need not surprise us to find, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, reference to an almost supernatural acuteness of hearing. Doubtless, we have here the unconscious memory of nocturnal eavesdroppings when, in the night, "hellish" things were heard by the child:¹ in other words, the father's sex attack on the mother. Similar unconscious memories are found at the root of many auditory hallucinations of paranoia.

The old man's heart-beat, that "hellish tattoo" which grew "quicker and quicker, and louder and louder", would thus be the heart's fanfare for the sex act: its assault on the woman and supremest pleasure. Whence, doubtless, in the tale, the furious *crescendo* of the heart-beats, twice repeated, which culminate first in the old man's death and, next, in the murderer's seizure and eventual death also. Thus, the talion law is satisfied twice; first by punishment of the mother's *murderer* and, then, by punishment of the slayer of that murderer.

In the last analysis, therefore, it is the Man of the Crowd—in this tale lying in the old man's bed—who thus receives just punishment. In the same way that, in neurotic symptoms, the repressed material finally emerges from the repressing process itself so, here, the sign of the crime, the clamouring heart in the sex act, reappears in this retributive punishment of the heart that thuds with the anguish of death.

Also, it is under the *bed*, in which his crime—the sex attack—was enacted, that the old man is stifled to death. Thus, the instrument of his crime, becomes that of his destruction.

The darkness again, black as pitch, where the old man—or the beating heart—sleeps, into which the hero spies and which is pierced by his lantern beam must, evidently, be interpreted as an echo of the intensity with which the child once wished to see through the dark. I knew a young man, whose memories of spying on his parent's sex acts reappeared, in analysis, in the shape of a dream where he saw himself, as a child, observing them through the diaphragm of his camera lens instead of eyes. Photography was very young in Poe's time and here, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the lantern, instead, symbolises viewing. We know, in primitive concepts

¹ Cf. Henri Barbusse, *L'Enfer*, (Paris, Librairie Mondiale, 1908) where sexuality in general is equated with "hell".

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of vision, that it is not the illuminated object which sends rays to the eye, but the eye which projects its rays on the object. This primitive concept reappears here, implicit in this way of viewing through darkness by half-opening a lantern shutter as though an eyelid. Juxtaposing this element in the tale with its main motif, the heart-beat, we get some idea how much yearning, both visual and aural, must have remained in the child Poe, all through his life with the Allans, to go on responding to the sex-scene as he once knew it with his mother.

* * *

Nevertheless, our tale gives quite another reason why this father-figure must be destroyed by the son-figure. The narrator declares that he "loves the old man", who never had "wronged" him or "given him insult" while, as for his "gold", for that he had no desire: all which, in fact, represent the opposites, as we showed, of Edgar's relation to his "Pa", John Allan.¹ There is a certain hypocrisy here and this tale, in which we might expect the son's ambivalence to the father to appear is, primarily, a tale of hate. The reason alleged, however, for this hate, is remarkable: the old man is hated for his eye.

"I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it."

We shall not presume to affirm that, in this mention of the vulture, there is an incontestable allusion to the mother, though the vulture was a classic mother symbol of the Ancient Egyptians and though we find it, later, in the vulture phantasy of the child Leonardo da Vinci.² But, what cannot be denied, is that the old man's eye establishes a direct connection with the eyes of the mother totem cats in *The Black Cat*. True, a film over the eye does not invariably imply a total loss of vision but, in general it does

¹ Similarly, in *Thou Art the Man*, (*Godey's Lady's Book*, November, 1844), the poor hack-writer, so appropriately named Mr. Pennifeather, is as innocent as the new-born babe of the murder of his rich uncle, Mr. Shuttleworthy, whose heir he is. Only a double of the latter, a rogue ironically called Old Charley Goodfellow, who likewise belongs to the series of "fathers", or hypocritical John Allans, could have been capable of so heinous a deed! Goodfellow succeeds in having the innocent nephew arrested and condemned to the gallows but, by a device typically Poe's, (the corpse of the victim rises to denounce his murderer from a case of wine), he is exposed and brought to justice. The murderer falls dead, while Pennifeather, released from prison, in all innocence enjoys the murdered man's fortune.

² FREUD: *Leonardo da Vinci: A Psycho-Sexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*. Op. cit. page 382, note 4.

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or, at least, suggests it. In other words, like Wotan in Germanic mythology, the father in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is represented as blind in one eye, which is equivalent to being castrated.¹

Clearly also, castrated for his crimes! For, as regards the mother, the father was indeed the prototype of all crime, as to the son. Was it not he who kept the son from the mother by wielding the threat of castration? Here, however, lies the rub! For, if it is the mother who, by her body, manifests to the son that the dread possibility of deprivation of the penis exists, in the last analysis it is the father—by whom or in whose interests the Œdipal prohibitions were instituted—who, from remotest time and the depths of the unconscious, threatens to castrate the son for his guilty desires. It is because the father has committed this crime against the son, that the latter repays him by castration in retribution of the crime for which the son would have been castrated; that of possessing the mother. Thus Zeus, when grown, castrated his father Kronos who, himself, had castrated Uranos, *his* father.

These are the two great, eternally human themes which underlie Poe's tale and confer such sovereign power on it. The two prime complexes, through which all humanity and every child must pass, are its marrow and substance. Here, the son's Œdipus wish for his father's death becomes effective; the father is struck down for the crime of possessing the mother and for inventing the curse of castration, first as a threat to the son, but more for effecting it. For it is the father whom the son generally considers responsible for the woman's castration, when he discovers she lacks the penis. Secure in memories of the parents' coitus, the child imagines that though the mother did not succumb to the father's sadistic attacks, nevertheless it cost her a wound which, like Amfortas's hurt, would go on eternally *bleeding*. The menstruation, of which the child, sooner or later, becomes aware, is the proof. Thus, for the great crime of bringing castration into the world when, without it, all created beings would be whole and entire, each of the parents, in his or her way, is responsible; the mother for having undergone the castration and the father for having inflicted it. That is why both must be punished. The cats are hanged or

¹ The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, article *Odin*, tells us that, among ancient peoples, prisoners taken in war were often sacrificed to the "one-eyed old man". "The commonest method of sacrifice was by hanging the victim on a tree; and in the poem, *Hávamál*, the god himself is represented as sacrificed in this way." There must be something more than coincidence in the fact that Wotan, the castrated father, should be hanged or, in other words, have his penis mockingly restored, in the same way as the Black Cat, a one-eyed monster like Wotan.

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immured and the old man is stifled under his mattress. Both flaunt the emblem of their common crime: the cats have a gouged-out eye and the old man's eye has a film over it.

Here it seems pertinent to ask whether the old man in *The Tell-Tale Heart* is, in fact, blind in that eye? Poe does not say: he even seems to imply that, in spite of its covering film, it still retains sight for, as he says at the start of the tale: "Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold". Later, after the murder, when the dismembered body is buried under the floor, he once more tells us: "no human eye—not even *his*—could have detected any thing wrong". Thus, extreme acuity of vision is now attributed to that eye. There is some contradiction here for, if in Poe's unconscious the eye, though filmed, retained its vision, nevertheless it continued a *blind* eye, as in the Norse myth of Father Wotan.

We know, however, that contradictions in the manifest content of dreams or myths represent other, perfectly coherent thoughts, in the latent content. This contradiction then, as regards the eye, an eye that can see so well in spite of its blindness, must derive from the fact that, in this story, the father receives punishment for two distinct crimes; first, that of coitus with the mother and second, for its result, which led to castration, as the mother reveals. Yet, to effect castration, a weapon was needed and this was the penis, so that, to enact his deed, the father must still possess the penis, though he will later be punished by castration for it. The old man's eye that sees and is sightless would, thus, in this apparent contradiction, condense two successive aspects of the criminal father; first, when with his weapon the crime is committed and, then, when as punishment that weapon is cut off.¹

* * *

There is a somewhat earlier tale by Poe where the father-castration motif appears far purer and death is not concomitant with castration. In

¹ Yet another contradiction may be noted. The sound of the old man's heart-beats is likened to the ticking of a watch: a watch "enveloped in cotton", even. Now watches or the ticking of a watch (in contrast, as we shall see, with the imposing swing of a clock pendulum) are classic symbols, in the unconscious, for the female organ and the throbbings, in sexual excitement, of the tiny clitoris it conceals. Before the old man's heart-beats have swollen to the "hellish tattoo" of truly virile character, they thus begin to beat twice, muted as it were, and in *feminine* fashion. We therefore may have here another instance of a dualism similar to that of the film-covered eye which both sees and does not see or, in other words, which is at the same time ultra-virile and castrated.

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The Man that was Used Up,¹ Brigadier John A. B. C. Smith, in full possession of his strength and faculties, while engaged in a more than epic campaign against the savage Kickapoos and Bugaboos, is captured and submitted to almost every kind of mutilation. The narrator, meeting the general at a social gathering, is at first dazzled by his fine presence, beautiful voice and assured manner. The general, in particular, passes for a very lion with women. Nevertheless, it is whispered that some mystery surrounds him, the nature of which the narrator cannot discover. At his wits' ends, he seeks the truth at its source and, one fine morning, calls on our hero. Though the general is at his toilet, the visitor is shown in. As he enters, he stumbles over a nondescript bundle which emits the ghost of a voice. It is the general, in the state to which he is reduced when without the artificial limbs, organs and muscles, prodigies of modern invention, which remedy his many mutilations. The cardinal mutilation, however, is not mentioned, but we may well imagine it included, for the Kickapoos and Bugaboos who so generously relieved him of leg, arm, shoulders, pectoral muscles, scalp, teeth, eye, palate and seven-eighths tongue, would surely not have left him the penis! The castration of prisoners, moreover, holds high place among tribes quite as savage as were the Kickapoos and Bugaboos!

Though the murderer in *The Tell-Tale Heart* also mutilated his victim by removing head, arms and legs before depositing him under the floor, what he "castrated" was but a corpse whereas the treatment to which General Smith is subjected is castration, in its pure symbolic form, and does not include death. For, though the castration motif (deprivation of the penis), is related to that of death (deprivation of existence), the two are not identical as this tale of *The Man that was Used Up* shows.

Moreover, in this tale, we find echoes of Poe's army life and a time when his military superiors stood, for him, in the place of the Father he had left, in fleeing from John Allan.

* * *

Before we close this study of *The Tell-Tale Heart*, let us seek to discern those features of the murdered old man, which would relate him to the child Edgar's successive fathers.

Poe's unconscious memories, as we saw, of the parents' coitus, dated from the time when, as an infant, he shared his mother's room on her

¹ *The Man that was Used Up. A Tale of the Late Bugaboo and Kickapoo Campaign: Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1839; 1840; 1843; *Broadway Journal*, II, 5.

The Tell-Tale Heart

tours with Mr. Placide. At that time his father was David Poe whom, doubtless, a lover was soon to replace; that mysterious unknown, Rosalie's father. Probably it was this lover from whom, primarily, derived the motif of the increasingly violent heartbeats. And the fact that, at last, when the man with the lantern bursts into the old man's room, he reveals himself by yelling and opening his lantern—slips which imply the wish to be revealed—may well re-echo another frequent occurrence; namely when the childish, jealous eavesdropper, with his cries or need to urinate, sought to interrupt the parents' intercourse because of the excitement communicated, or for other reasons.

All these impressions however, so precociously stored up, after Edgar's adoption were transferred *en bloc* to John Allan, a far more imposing father whose harshness laid an indelible mark on the growing child. It was certainly in this respectable, middle-class household, that the repression of his precociously early sexuality was forced upon Poe. This was the time when he was scourged by the castration-complex, whence our morality derives. Thus, the old man's film-clouded, vulture-like eye belongs, in fact, to John Allan. It was on him that the full force of the child's Œdipal rage and resentment must have been concentrated, given the fact that, dour and forbidding, he stood in the father's position to Poe, in addition to owning and, martyring, his new mother. To us, the old man's heart-beats appear, at least, triply determined. If, firstly they represent the panting of coitus, overheard in the dark of fortuitous lodgings during his mother's life, its cardiac transposition must be determined by memories of the heart attacks experienced by his dropsical father John Allan which again, in reality, were echoed by the neurotic, alcoholic, heart of the son Edgar. Yet, these hearts ail because they are guilty of one and the same sin; that of desiring the mother. Their disease, like their precipitate heartbeats, to Poe's unconscious, expresses both the crime and the punishment.

The compulsion of the man with the lantern to open the old man's door, night after night, that he may watch him asleep and alone, in bed, surely also re-echoes some precise reminiscence of Poe's, as a child. And indeed, it is unlikely that John Allan, who disliked his wife's love of the orphan, would have permitted him to sleep in their room, even if ill, to please her. Besides, the Allans had a large comfortable house and slaves. It was to one of these, his black "mammy", that Edgar would be entrusted and, with her, he would have slept.¹

¹ Cf. *Israfel*, p. 61, for a reference to this "mammy".

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Perhaps through this negress, in "pitch"-black nights, nights as dark as her skin, the listening child may have re-experienced its responses to the parents' coitus,—which he could only hear in the dark—as the man with the lantern listens to the old man's heart. Nevertheless, the libido of this child, as Poe's life and tales both testify—for in neither do negresses play any part—was by then fixated on his foster mother, as white and pretty as his own, in accordance with the classic mechanism of the compulsion to repetition. It was on her room that, falling asleep, his childish desires must have converged at night, because he so loved and desired her, and because of his jealousy, too; all his yearning, in fact, to see what another was doing there.

That "other" was John Allan, whom the child would certainly suspect as guilty of similar attacks to those he remembered made on his mother. When the man with the lantern, night after night, feels urged to go and spy on the old man's bedroom, he doubtless only enacts what the child, kept by his nurse in his crib was, in his helplessness, prevented from doing. Though the image of the mother is here suppressed, as in *The Man of the Crowd*, it is nevertheless for her, that the father has one eye blinded and then is killed.

It is the old man's death that is at stake in this Œdipal battle, where the mother is the prize. But the mother is eliminated from the story, and the old man appears alone in bed, as the small Edgar would doubtless have wished John Allan always to be. Apparently, the old man's solitary sleep re-echoes one of the phantasy-wishes of the small Edgar.

Yet, though the old man sleeps alone, his heart beats in *crescendos*. Thus, he condenses in one being both the negation and affirmation of the father's coital activity, in the same way that his eye suggests both the presence and absence of the penis. Such modes of representation are natural to the unconscious, in which opposites exist side by side. Though conscious logic disapprove them, none the less, continue buried in our depths, as the dreams of the normal and the neurotic testify, as well as the myths to which humanity has given birth.

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Masquerades

IN *The Cask of Amontillado*,¹ we find another tale in which the woman and mother does not appear; nevertheless, it is again through her that, in this grim story, the father meets death.

Poe must have written this story during that period of hypomanic excitement which accompanied his sudden passion for Mrs. Osgood and his equal hostility to those who kept them apart; Mrs. Ellet and her brother, Lummis and Thomas Dunn English.

It will be remembered that in Spring 1845, at his friend Willis's house, Poe met and was seized with an instant infatuation for the fragile and consumptive poetess, Frances Osgood. It was the first of the great passions that marked the latter years of his life. The two were much seen together during the winter of 1845-46 but, following the pattern of all Poe's affairs the relation, though ardent, remained platonic. Letters were exchanged, none of which, unfortunately, appear to have been handed down. In the summer of 1846, Mrs. Ellet, a busybody and mischief-maker, went out to *Fordham* to call on the Poes but only found Mrs. Clemm. Muddy was so unwise as to show her certain of Frances Osgood's letters, whence resulted scandalised protests from the "literati" and Mrs. Osgood's demand for the letters to be returned through Mrs. Ellet.

Poe had already returned the Osgood letters, as also Mrs. Ellet's. That lady's brother, however, denied their receipt, and is reported to have paraded New York, armed with pistols and threatening Poe. This was when Poe is reputed to have asked his old enemy, Thomas Dunn English, to act as his second. English, according to his own story refused and also refused to lend Poe a pistol; then turned him out of the house. There then followed the "War of the *Literati*", which the two men conducted in the *New-York Mirror*. Poe sued English for libel and won.

¹ *The Cask of Amontillado*: *Godey's Lady's Book*, November, 1846.

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Mrs. Osgood, alarmed by all this, broke with Poe and fled to Providence, which left a clear field to Griswold, who also yearned for her hand.

Poe's attitude to Griswold at this time remains enigmatic. Such of Poe's letters to Griswold as survive, are uniformly courteous. Was Poe unaware that the latter was his rival or was he, thus, overcompensating a jealousy more or less unconscious? At all events, Poe seems to have turned most of his aggression on English, after his strange and fleeting effort at a reconciliation.¹

Since Poe was a poet, the aggression against a possible, suspected rival, which was part of his passion for this new Frances met in his thirty-sixth year, would seem to have fully vented itself in *The Cask of Amontillado*.

* * *

The result of Poe's passion for the new Frances was to reactivate, once more, his deep-rooted, infantile Œdipal rivalry with the father and, as we shall see, Fortunato, the successful rival of Count Montresor, displays many a feature of the brothers and fathers who were to follow each other through his life.

"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could", begins Montresor, "but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge". In striking Poe, Thomas Dunn English had doubtless reactivated memories of John Allan's whippings which, it will be remembered, continued into Poe's adolescence. Then however, the boy, under his roof and fearing the consequences, was forced to conceal his hate.

"You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat . . . I must not only punish, but punish with impunity."

Thus, doubtless, had the child Poe longed to treat his foster parent.

"He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared." (So the father is seen by the son.) "He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine . . . In this respect I did not differ from him materially;—I was skilful in the Italian vintages myself. . . ."

Thus, both father and son love wine which, here, is equated with the intoxicating delights of sole possession of the milk and breasts of the mother, an excellent symbol of their Œdipal rivalry. It little matters that Fortunato also reveals certain brother-features as, for instance, his age,

¹ Cf. in particular *Israfel*, pp. 702 ff., and Poe's correspondence during these years in Vol. 17, *Virginia Edition*. Cf. also above, pages 132-4.

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which seems fairly near his rival's, or superficially evokes Griswold and English, both hated "brothers" of the pen; or that he also embodies Henry Poe, his alcoholic, consumptive brother, who coughed like Fortunato in this tale. All this may be merely the better to let Montresor exact a hideous and safe vengeance on these brother-figures who, condensed in Fortunato, represent diminished fathers. Doubtless, Henry Poe also merges with David, Henry's father—like him, an alcoholic and consumptive—and John Allan, the connoisseur of good wine, all three of whom, like Fortunato, were dead and buried when Poe wrote this tale.

Poe now transports us to a carnival in full swing. These masquerades which play so great, so sinister a part in Poe's works (*The Cask of Amontillado*, *Hop-Frog*, *King Pest*, *The Mask of the Red Death*), and always in connection with the father complex, may they not echo the theatrical ambience into which Poe was born? Be that as it may, "It was about dusk," he tells us,

"one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting, parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells . . . I said to him—'My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met . . . I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts'."

Fortunato, his curiosity and thirst both aroused, presses to be allowed to taste the wine, despite Montresor's feigned opposition, intended to whet his desire. Montresor then leads Fortunato to his vaults.

"I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors."

For this strange scion of the Montresors keeps his wine amid the grim relics of his ancestors' bones.

"The pipe . . ." says Fortunato, naturally surprised.

"'It is farther on,'" replies Montresor, "'but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.'" This whiteness, nitre, in fact, is symbolically that which gleamed at the South Pole in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. And now this whiteness, wine, littered bones and caves, combine to form one of the strangest icy phantasies of the dead

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mother's interior ever imagined by Poe. The lofty family vault which awaits the *Sleeper* seems, in comparison, cheerful and even the resonant, metal-sheathed, chamber from which the Lady Madeline emerged is, comparatively, far less chill.

For several minutes a fit of coughing paralyses Fortunato; doubtless an echo of that family complaint which presumably first killed his father, then his mother and, later, his brother Henry. Even as he wrote this story, the same cough was already at work in Virginia and his second Frances, Mrs. Osgood. Evidently it is a risky business consorting with consumptive women and his father's coitus with his wife Elizabeth was, doubtless, what ended his days! He, like Fortunato, had loved wine—and women—too well; like him he coughed and, like him, found death . . . in entering the mother. Now, in the tale, it is as though Montresor's mockery drives Fortunato to his grave.

Fortunato, meanwhile, continues to advance, despite Montresor's feigned efforts to restrain him. Almost one seems to hear Poe sneering at his more fortunate rival, the father:—What! you insist? You must have her at all costs—woman—the mother? Very well, then, she is yours: you wished it yourself: it is no doing of mine. Seize and take and enjoy the dead woman's maddening delights; then, to her bones, her thighs, in just retribution, death will fetter you forever . . . The interior of the woman's body, represented by this cavern where the coveted, supreme intoxication dwells, thus becomes the instrument of retribution as in that unlikely invention of Octave Mirbeau, where the woman's caressing hand becomes an instrument of horrible torture.¹

The two men still go forward between "walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs". Drops of moisture "trickle among the bones" for the vault is below the bed of a river. Now Montresor, pleading the other's cough, makes a last effort to dissuade him from continuing. Possibly he wishes to be able to think that, if Fortunato insists on thoroughly exploring the mother-cavern, it will be his own fault. When Fortunato, however, refuses to turn back, Montresor, for the second time, offers him wine. Here, then! grimly mocking, he seems to say, as he opens his vaults, you can have the Mother! And, as he breaks off the necks of a bottle of Graves and then of Médoc for his guest, it is as though he adds . . . "and here, for you, are her maddening breasts". Thus, from vault to vault they pass and, at last, reach a "deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air

¹ *Le Jardin des Supplices*, Paris, E. Fasquelle, 1899

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caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame". From this, at the remotest end, there opens another, lined with human remains, from the fourth side of which the bones are thrown down and, at one point, form a mound of some size. "Within the wall thus exposed . . . a still interior . . . recess" is perceived,

"in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite."

Such is the *cul-de-sac* in which this passage or mother-cloaca ends. Even the unconscious memory of the legs has not been omitted, for the niche is hollowed from between two huge pillars.

It is between these pillars that Montresor invites Fortunato to seek the Amontillado and rapture, and it is between them that Montresor chains him to the granite. Savagely, sadistically, for the last time, he then mockingly implores him to depart. But now the father's penis is finally captive and the phantasy wish to return to the womb, as to a once-experienced beatitude, is converted into a horrible phantasy of anguish and death. Not by chance then, as we now see, is the prenatal state the only image we can make of our post-mortal condition.

With the trowel he has brought, Montresor now begins to wall his rival in the niche, though resting at times on the bones to gloat over his victim's anguish. When Fortunato screams, the other yells back until the clamourer falls still. Finally, his revenge is accomplished, the last stone placed and the rampart of bones re-erected. "For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*"

Thus, with this last grim sneer, the criminal ends his story. His crime went unpunished. There were no officers of the law to pull down the tell-tale wall, as in *The Black Cat*. For fifty years, the son would lord it, with impunity, in a *palace* raised over vaults filled with the mother's bones; bones upon which the son, in no empty symbol, sat as owner¹ during his rival's death-throes.

The aggression released in Poe must have been extreme, when writing

¹ *Possidere*=*possess*: In German, *besitzen*: to be seated upon.

Cf. the giraffe phantasy of little Hans, reported by Freud, in which the child imagined himself seated as master on the back of a giraffe, a mother-animal. (FREUD: *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy*, op. cit. page 250, note 1.)

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this story, to make it so convincing, despite its romantic trappings, and to so completely stifle all visible affect of remorse.

* * *

There are, however, two other tales by Poe in which parricide goes equally unpunished, *King Pest*¹ and *Hop-Frog*.² In *King Pest*,—which formed part of the original *Tales of the Folio Club*—the buffoonish tone well serves to cloak the content. What matters it that *King Pest*—symbolically enough, again disguised as a bad actor—dies under a trap door, or that the two princes, his doubles, meet a grotesque death in enabling two carousing sailors to carry off Queen Pest, and the Archduchess Anapest, her double?

Hop-Frog, in spite of its title, is a far more sombre story. “The five prose pages I finished yesterday are called—what do you think?”—wrote Poe to Annie in February, 1849³—“I am sure you will never guess—‘Hop-Frog!’—Only think of *your* Eddy writing a story with *such* a name as ‘Hop-Frog’! You would never guess the subject (which is a terrible one) from the title, I am sure”. Actually, this last of Poe’s tales to be published in his lifetime, though terrible, is far livelier than *The Cask of Amontillado*, and once more celebrates the son’s total Œdipal triumph.

Hop-Frog is the jester and dwarf of a large corpulent king whose passion is joking and whose seven ministers, as large and corpulent as himself, are equally fond of jokes. Limping and quick-witted, this dwarf—so named by the ministers because of his “interjectional” gait—is attached to Tripetta, “a young girl very little less dwarfish than himself (although of exquisite proportions, and a marvellous dancer)”, Both

“had been forcibly carried off from their respective homes in adjoining provinces, and sent as presents to the king, by one of his ever-victorious generals”.

“Under these circumstances, it is not to be wondered at that a close intimacy arose between the two little captives”, while Tripetta, “on account of her grace and exquisite beauty (although a dwarf) was universally admired and petted” and possessed much influence, “which she never failed to use, whenever she could, for the benefit of Hop-Frog.”

¹ *King Pest: A Tale Containing an Allegory. Southern Literary Messenger*, September 1835; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 15.

² *Hop-Frog: The Flag of Our Union*, 1849.

³ Poe to Annie, Thursday—8th (no doubt February, 1849); *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 330.

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As we begin to suspect, Hop-Frog again represents Poe the child, even to his being dwarfish, who was carried off forcibly, at an early age, by the wicked father, John Allan, embodied here in the king and his seven masks, the evil ministers. Not only, however, has the orphan been carried off, but the fragile, sylph-like Tripetta with him; Tripetta, his protectress, who seems the diminished phantom of the dancer, Elizabeth Arnold. Even the relative proportions of mother and son are to some extent preserved, for Tripetta is *less* dwarfish than her friend, the jester.

Now the king determines to give a masked ball though, to the very last, he cannot decide what costumes he and his ministers shall wear. Finally, Hop-Frog and Tripetta are summoned and find the monarch "sitting at his wine with the seven members of his cabinet council". Knowing that Hop-Frog is afraid of wine, which "excited the poor cripple almost to madness", the king forces him to drink. May we not see here some echo of the time when the small Edgar, standing on the dining-room table, was forced to drink toasts by John Allan, as well as a sort of reproach against this father who encouraged him to drink so early, for we know that, when this tale was written, Poe was threatened by delirium tremens? Poe's alcoholism, it is true, had other and deeper roots, as we have already shown and shall demonstrate more clearly; roots that also traced back to the father complex. But, here, it is the biographical factor on which he most seems to insist.

Be that as it may, when the dwarf hesitates before the second goblet of wine which is thrust upon him by the king, Tripetta, "pale as a corpse", (whom indeed she re-embodies), advances "to the monarch's seat" and, falling on her knees, intercedes on his behalf.

"The tyrant regarded her, for some moments . . . At last, without uttering a syllable, he pushed her violently from him, and threw the contents of the brimming goblet in her face."

Thus, in this vinous form, where the wine stains represent substitutes for stains of sperm and blood, the king in *Hop-Frog* enacts his sadistic attack on the mother.

That the underlying significance of this act is as serious as the razor-slashing in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, or the axe-blow in *The Black Cat*, its effect on the dwarf proves.

"The poor girl got up as best she could . . . There was a dead silence for about half a minute . . . It was interrupted by a low, but harsh and protracted *grating* sound which seemed to come at once from every corner of the room."

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It is the dwarf grinding his teeth for now it is the jester, representing the son, who is endowed with the fearful *teeth* that can slay and castrate.

Precisely, now, the dwarf conceives that the king and his ministers should disguise themselves as orang-outangs, exactly like the killer in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue!*

The ball takes place. Hop-Frog, himself, clothes the tall and corpulent king, with his ministers, in tight-fitting garments which are saturated with tar and plastered with flax, and sees that all are chained together. Then, as midnight strikes, the "eight chained orang-outangs", (whose fetters, we shall see, are almost as grimly significant as were Fortunato's in his cave), rush into the ballroom and throw the women into fearful confusion. Earlier, Hop-Frog had arranged to have the hall lighted by flambeaux placed in the right hand of "each of the Caryatides that stood against the wall" and, at the same time, had had the central chandelier removed. As a result, only its heavy chain hung from the high, domed ceiling, and the counter-balance by which it was raised or lowered lay concealed on the roof of the ballroom. At this point, Hop-Frog approaches the orang-outangs with a torch, as though to discover their identity and, suddenly attaching the chain which binds them together to the empty hook from which the chandelier recently hung, causes it, at once, to be drawn out of reach. Thanks to the superhuman strength of his arms which compensates his weak legs, the jester then leaps on the king orang-outang's head and climbs up the chain which, manipulated from outside by Tripetta, slowly raises its human burden. And now Hop-Frog touches his torch to the flax of the king's costume, and the eight dignitaries are set ablaze. Tripetta is avenged, and Hop-Frog and his friend escape through the skylight.¹

¹ It will be seen that Poe's inspiration for this tale came from the episode of the Bal des Ardens, related by Froissart. The reader will remember that Charles VI, who had been subject to intermittent attacks of insanity after his horse was stopped in the Forêt du Mans and an unknown wanderer threatened him, needed constant diversion. A masked ball was planned to distract him. Several dancers, the king among them, conceived the idea of fastening themselves together with chains, and smearing their bodies with pitch and flax. During the dances, however, a dancer passed too near a servant bearing a torch, whereupon the flax of his costume burst into flames. The whole of the courtiers were burned save only the king, who was saved by the Duchesse de Berri, his aunt, winding her long train round him.

Duke Louis of Orleans was suspected of having prepared this cruel plot. Even though he may have had no part in it, the popular imagination would inevitably have credited him with behaving like Hop-Frog.

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According to Hervey Allen,¹ there is an allegory in this tale which he considers transparent, though generally overlooked. Thus, Hop-Frog would represent Imagination; Tripetta Fancy; and the King prosaic Reality, which seeks to enslave both. When, however, they finally free themselves, they wreak vengeance on the tyrant in the cruel manner we saw. This may well be but what is clear is that, underlying this surface significance of the tale, if Poe ever saw it that way—a significance too detached, abstract and allegorical to explain the interest this strange story still continues to excite—there throbs an altogether deeper significance fed from vital instincts. Hop-Frog is Poe, alive, concrete and not Poe's imagination in abstract; Tripetta is the mourned mother and graceful dancer, not just "fancy" detached from the ailing actress; the king, though a tyrant in the cause of prosaic reality, is no more prosaic than John Allan, the merchant. Prosaic reality, in abstract, irrespective of these prosaic people, is even less here the target than was Science, "as such", in Poe's sonnet condemning Science as enemy of Poetry. For that, as we saw, was tantamount to indicting the Father as enemy of the Mother.²

First and foremost, *Hop-Frog* is a typical Œdipus story in which the son triumphantly compensates his infirmity, doubtless symbolic of the author's impotence for, as we saw, the crippled dwarf has stronger arms than any. Thus, he can climb so high above the assembled guests that he is able to kill the king and escape with his beloved. *Hop-Frog* is a typical Œdipus tale, moreover, in that the son triumphantly gratifies the two great wishes which inspire the Œdipus complex: first, by burning to death the king to requite him for his guilty penis-urethral erotism, (his orang-outang's livery was the murderer's in another tale) and, then, by burning his seven ministers, all doubles of the cardinal royal figure. In addition, he escapes unharmed with Tripetta, the dancer, his protectress and abettor—who represents Poe's mother—"to their own country; for neither was seen again".

Nevertheless, it would be an error to conclude that these tales of the triumphant son contain no moral. The murderer "sons" in *Hop-Frog* and even in *The Cask of Amontillado*, go unpunished, but it is because they themselves become executioners. This is especially clear in *Hop-Frog* where the jester primarily avenges an injury done to *another*, which raises his horrible revenge to a higher moral plane. Even Montresor, in the vengeance he takes in his vaults, is killing one who has insulted and

¹ *Israfel*, page 641.

² See pages 55-57.

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injured him. The fact that the injury and Montresor's reaction to it, though quite disproportionate, are widely separated in time, and that vengeance is wreaked in cold blood, alters nothing. In any case, generally speaking, one might ask whether every attacker or criminal does not think he has a *right* to his attack or crime. This is what those who commit crimes of jealousy call taking the law into their hands and even thieves, though they do not generally proclaim it, always think, more or less, that they justly dispossess the "haves", in a society where wealth appears so unfairly distributed.

Possibly, in certain of these cases, as in *Hop-Frog*, a dominant maternal super-ego reinforces the son, as Tripetta Hop-Frog, and permanently or temporarily replaces the father super-ego. This would enable the son to gratify his wishes unhindered.

Phylogenetically and ontogenetically, it cannot be denied that the father is commonly less indulgent than the mother to the son's wishes and it is he who, generally, promulgates the moral laws of the son, whatever liberties he himself takes as top-dog.

* * *

Although the father's orgies are sometimes punished, as in *King Pest*, *The Cask of Amontillado* and *Hop-Frog*, the sons are punished still more inevitably and cruelly, for the father still rules on in death, as history well shows and the fate of Prince Prospero in *The Masque of the Red Death*.¹

This tale was doubtless written as a result of the effect upon Poe of Virginia's first lung-hæmorrhage, which occurred in January 1842. That same May *The Masque of the Red Death* appeared in *Graham's Magazine*.

No other work of Poe's drips blood like this.

"The 'Red Death' had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour."

Hæmoptyses do not last long, either: they occur suddenly and the scarlet blood appears, "especially" on the face.

¹ *The Masque of the Red Death: Graham's Magazine*, May, 1842; *The Broadway Journal*, II, 2.

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"But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron . . ."

Once they are in, the bolts of these gates are welded from within.

"The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion. The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the 'Red Death'."

Thus did Prince Prospero, entrenched in his abbey, like those in the *Decameron*, imagine he had walled out the Red Death—gory symbol of castration and death—and created a hermetically sealed world into which those scourges could never enter.

Whereupon, since those dire penalties no longer existed, penalties by which the father of the primal horde once imposed morality on his licentious and mutinous sons, they could give rein to their pleasures.

"It was toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

"It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade."

Yet how oddly Poe conceives that "voluptuous scene," for any other author, we imagine, would surely have included naked women in these revels of the licentious Prospero! Here, however, all are closely masked—and how strangely? Though there is "wine" at this resplendent ball, lasciviousness is entirely absent. Chastity reigns at this court. For him, as for Poe, his creator, sensual delights had no genital expression.

Follows a description of the magnificent rooms which form the ball-room and, with the first sentence, Poe transports us into his idea of a "voluptuous scene". It is as though his *The Philosophy of Furniture*¹ was,

¹ *The Philosophy of Furniture: Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, May, 1840; *Broadway Journal*, I, 18.

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here, raised to the *n*th degree. "There were seven" such rooms, "—an imperial suite. In many palaces . . . such suites form a long and straight vista . . ." but here . . .

"the apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time. There was a sharp turn at every twenty or thirty yards, and at each turn a novel effect. To the right and left, in the middle of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued the windings of the suite. These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue—and vividly blue were its windows."

From east to west the rooms are successively blue, purple, green, orange, white and violet.

"The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet tapestries that hung all over the ceiling and down the walls, falling in heavy folds upon a carpet of the same material and hue. But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were scarlet—a deep blood color. Now in no one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum . . . But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room. And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all."

Merely to read this description stifles one. There is no air in the rooms, only openings that give on to a closed corridor, whence the light comes faintly through windows of stained glass. The rooms wind one from another, without issue, as in a nightmare. And it is this kind of setting which Poe calls "voluptuous"!

Let us here recall, however, how often dwelling-places—palaces, castles, houses, vaults and cellars—appear as symbols in the dreams and art-forms of humanity. In all cases they represent transferences from that primal dwelling in which we all originally abode; the mother's body. This same symbolism is evident in several of Poe's tales and in the *Fall of the House of Usher* with its grim manor. In the present tale, the symbol of

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the fortified abbey seems no less clear. Prince Prospero, threatened by the Red Death—a fresh and, this time, terrible personification of the criminal father—has taken refuge in his abbey, *i.e.*, the mother's womb. The symbolism here, however, derives from the deepest, most ancient levels of the unconscious and womb, thus, is equivalent to the mother's bowels. A similar significance informs Montresor's vaults in *The Cask of Amontillado* as, also, the meandering black chasms on the Island of Tsalal in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. The gloomy succession of winding rooms in *The Masque of the Red Death* is of the same sort. In all three instances it is the interior of the mother's body that is symbolically represented in intestinal terms, in accord with those infantile anal theories of birth which possibly, all children, at some time, have had.

I once met an old lady, brought up in ignorance of such matters, who told me that, after her defloration, she was never clear whether it was from the anus or vulva that she bled.

In the same way, the seventh and western-most room of Prospero's abbey is draped in anal black, though bathed in blood-red light from the window; the mother's menstrual flow is thus recalled, linked with her hæmoptyses; both are conceived as derivatives of the cloaca since, to the child's imagination, no alternative exists. Once more, as in dreams, phantasies and myths, we find that topography is a replica of anatomy, as the primitive imagination conceives.¹

But whereas Arthur Gordon Pym escaped death twice, once by hiding in the ship's hold and again in a cavern, Prince Prospero's uterine retreat—in this, like Montresor's vaults—is a less sure protection. A lugubrious symbol of the fact warns the whirling revellers for, in the black-and-scarlet western hall,

“there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers performe

¹ There seems to be little doubt that the schoolboy who finds difficulty in remembering and understanding geography has failed to resolve his infantile castration complex. Moreover, it is clearly regret for the “lost penis” which so frequently conditions the poor showing made by women in geography. They do not want to see the anatomic layout.

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ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company . . .”

Then, when the hour was struck, the smiles and looks would be exchanged again, with whispered vows that the next chimes should produce no similar emotion. But

“after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.”

The “dull, heavy, monotonous” ticking pendulum of this huge, funereal, ebony clock, is strangely reminiscent of “the low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton”, of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Clocks play a great part—and always the same—in Poe’s tales. We shall go more deeply into this motif when we come to deal with *The Pit and the Pendulum* where, likewise, the womb-retreat provides no sure protection. Suffice it, here, to observe that the huge clock in *The Masque of the Red Death* is like something alive, with its pendulum that beats like a heart and its “brazen lungs”. Nor is the word “lungs” a mere metaphor. For, here, the giant clock acts out Father Time, that grey-beard with the scythe, incarnating the universal father Kronos who, also, so grimly appears in *The Pit and the Pendulum*. That is why, in this tale, though no need exists to cringe under the scythe, like the Inquisition’s victim, the courtiers, who all double the son, tremble at the clock’s voice and brazen respiration—symbols, as in *Loss of Breath*, of the father’s male potency—and the mere tick-tock of its heart. There, in that abbey-womb, they had believed themselves secure from the primal castrator and slayer: they cannot, however, escape the avenging father, though in the deepest recesses of the mother’s body.

“But, in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel . . .”

the duke having “directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great *fête*; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. Be sure they were grotesque. There were much glare and glitter and piquancy and phantasm—much of what has been since seen in *Hernani*.”

Poe’s “glitter”, however, is certainly not Hugo’s!

“There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions,

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There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the *bizarre*, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust."

Truly, a "voluptuous" scene!

Meanwhile, the ebony clock continues to strike the hours. "And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock." As the night wears on, "none of the maskers . . . dare venture into the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven", though between the striking of the hours, and in the other rooms, "the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sound of midnight upon the clock". Suddenly all is motionless and still, for . . . "now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock" with more of time for

"the meditations of the thoughtful . . . And thus, too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had utterly sunk into silence, there were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise—then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust."

Though "the masquerade licence of the night" was "nearly unlimited", the whole company

"seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in *blood*—and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

"When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image (which with a slow and solemn movement, as if more truly to sustain its *rôle*, stalked to and fro among the waltzers) he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror or distaste; but, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

"'Who dares?' he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him—'who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery?

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Seize him and unmask him—that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise from the battlements!”

“It was in the eastern or blue chamber . . . where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side.”

No one, however, dare obey his orders. But the mask, “with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker” and “passed within a yard of the prince’s person”. Then

“while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way uninterruptedly, but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber to the purple—through the purple to the green—”

and so on—“ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him”.

At this, the Prince,

“maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him . . . He bore aloft a drawn dagger, and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted his pursuer. There was a sharp cry—and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero.”

Thereupon, a throng of revellers rushes into the room and,

“seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

“And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel . . . And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.”

* * *

In *The Man of the Crowd*, we saw the father as one guilty of a crime; in *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *Hop-Frog* we saw him receive his just punishment; in *The Masque of the Red Death*, we see him return, no less justly, as the avenger.

The masker who sows death can be no other. The son, Prince Prospero,

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has committed a crime. Regardless of the prevailing epidemic which decimates his subjects, he has entrenched himself in his abbey, with his thousand courtiers, to lead a gay life. There, in the belief he is secure, he does nothing but revel.¹ Though lust seems absent from these orgies, the mother's rape appears crystal-clear in the whole symbolism of the abbey. It can only be ignored because it is writ so large and so extensively over the tale, in the same way that, on a map, one misses the names of continents or countries because of the size and spacing of the letters.

The manner in which the woman, the mother, is thus ravished, is depicted even in the details of the ball. Though lust is not included, the entertainment, nevertheless offers "delirious fancies, such as the madman fashions . . . much of the *bizarre*, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust". Thus, Prince Prospero's imagination, which is responsible for all this, is typically sadistic and his sumptuous masquerade resembles the phantasies of some *enfant terrible* who, ignorant of adult genitality, can only delight in horrors. The Mother-abbey is, indeed, ravished, but only in the sadistic, cloacal fashion so well evoked by the sinister succession of halls and grimacing maskers.

Nevertheless, the Œdipus crime is here depicted as carried out in both aspects; the son ravishes the mother, to which end the father was defeated, killed. "All these" attractions ". . . were within", while "without was the 'Red Death' ", *i.e.*, the father—who slays and is slain. The Red Death kills as did the Man of the Crowd, or the orang-outang in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, or the owner of the Black Cat, or as John Allan "killed" Frances, and David Poe or the unknown lover "killed" the consumptive Elizabeth. For this crime, the son, in his turn, kills the father; not as a rival, merely, but as avenger. Similarly, reversing the parents' rôles Orestes, avenging his father Agamemnon, kills his murdering mother Clytemnestra. Then, however, the Furies, re-embodying the mother, return to punish the son in similar fashion to the *Red Death* reappearing in the abbey. In any case, this vengeful return of the Œdipal father is an eternal theme. We see it in the stone Commander returning to carry Don Juan to hell, and in the words Jehovah traced on the palace wall during Belshazzar's feast, whereupon "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean King was slain".²

¹ Not without reason does *revel* derive from *rebellare*. The revolt against authority, *i.e.*, against the father who inculcated moral conscience in the son, is etymologically implied in the word *revel*.

² *Daniel*, V, 30.

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Here we may recall Poe's "parable", *Shadow*, one of *The Tales of the Folio Club*,¹ in which a company of friends assemble, also, in time of pestilence, about a festive table.

"The year had been a year of terror, and . . . far and wide . . . the black wings of the Pestilence were spread abroad . . . Over some flasks of the red Chian wine, within the walls of a noble hall, in a dim city called Ptolemais, we sat, at night, a company of seven . . . A dead weight hung upon us . . . Yet we laughed and were merry in our proper way . . . although the purple wine reminded us of blood. For there was yet another tenant of our chamber in the person of young Zoilus. Dead, and at full length he lay, enshrouded;—the genius and the demon of the scene . . ."

and seemed to watch the seven drinkers with eyes "in which Death had but half extinguished the fire of the pestilence". Though the narrator of this dark history, the Greek named Oinos, (meaning *wine*), felt the eyes of the departed upon him, he forces himself to sing.

"And lo! from among those sable draperies where the sounds of the song departed, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow"

which moved about the room till, at length, it rested

"in full view upon the surface of the door of brass . . . And the door whereupon the shadow rested was . . . over against the feet of the young Zoilus enshrouded . . ."

The shadow then speaks and tells how it comes from the plains of Charon, at which the seven drinkers rise trembling, for

"the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings", which ". . . fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends".

This reduplication of the voice of the shadow may possibly cover more than a royal "we" and may, indeed, represent unconscious memories, allegorically transposed, of Poe's many "fathers" by the time he was three. As for the young Zoilus he, like Prospero, is an equally guilty son slain for his misdeeds by his father's ghost. When Poe wrote *Shadow* in 1831, reality had singularly reactivated this motif of punishment of the son's misdeeds, for he had just seen his brother Henry die of the phthisis which

¹ *Shadow, A Parable: Southern Literary Messenger*, September, 1835; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, I, 22.

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carried off their father and mother so young. Thus, Oinos-Edgar the poet-drunkard, might well tremble at the sight of Zoilus-Henry, the drunkard struck down by the plague and dread the father ghost's reprisals, and read therein his fate.

What the shade returns to avenge, in every myth of the father's vengeance, is the whole Œdipus crime; the dual crime of parricide and incest, actual or symbolic. Don Juan does kill the Commander whose daughter, a mother-figure, he has, in fact, stolen. Belshazzar has seized and profaned the sacred vessels of God's Temple, by drinking from them at his feasts. "Vessels" (cups, goblets, etc.) universally symbolise woman and here, the mother; for these are vessels solely consecrated to Jehovah, the supreme father. Prospero withdrew into the abbey-mother and believed himself its secure possessor. All these, Don Juan, Belshazzar, Prospero and even Zoilus—are struck down in their revels, their *drinking* orgies. Their crime is that of orally ravishing the mother, like the drunkard-hero in *The Black Cat*, like King Pest throned so grotesquely at his punch-bowl, like the king in *Hop-Frog* who forces the dwarf to drink and like Fortunato in *The Cask of Amontillado*. We are told that wine was one of the delights of Prospero's abbey and that the Ptolemaic feast of Zoilus and Oinos (symbolic name) is celebrated only in wine. So too, Belshazzar drank wine from vessels sacred to God, and Don Juan blasphemously invited the Commander to drink at his feast, which latter—worst mockery of all—is symbolically equated with inviting him to watch Don Juan possess the mother. For, as we have repeatedly shown, the predilection to wine, alcohol and drinking, however deeply tinged with later acquired homosexuality, primarily derives from the first nutrient proffered the child—the milk of the mother's breast. One may even ask whether the wine "purple as blood" in *Shadow*, and the rivers like veins of blood on the island of Tsalal, do not indicate a phantasy regression to a still earlier phase. Possibly blood, at times, displaces milk, because, in the pre-natal phase, it is blood not milk which nourishes the foetus.

Be that as it may, this refuge of Prince Prospero's in his abbey is a womb-phantasy and so, on the pregenital level, equated to incest with the mother. It is thus that it is interpreted by the ousted father, represented by the avenging masker, and that is why he returns to punish the son in the place where he has sought refuge. The punishment, like the crime, is two-fold; the son is slain, as is clear, in talion for his parricide, and is castrated in talion for his incest. For, as Prince Prospero raises his dagger to strike the masker, the latter suddenly turns:

"There was a sharp cry—and the dagger dropped gleaming upon the

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sable carpet, upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death the Prince Prospero".

Here death could be represented as such: castration could not. But that it is introduced symbolically is clear from the fact that it is the dagger, (equivalent to the razor in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and the axe in *The Black Cat*), which drops at the father's glance and leaves the son weaponless. The masker of the Red Death, spectre of the avenging father thus, more personally, punishes the guilty son than his surrogates the police in *The Tell-Tale Heart* or *The Black Cat*. He does not need the law's minions, prisons, law courts or scaffolds: he has but to turn, whereupon not only the prince, supreme embodiment of the son, but all his courtiers, all his reduplications, fall dead at his feet. Though the father in *Shadow* was infinitely reduplicated, in this case it is the son. "And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel."

After which, the sado-phallic activities of the father himself may end, once his vengeance is accomplished. "And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay." In the western chamber, the sun, or father, does in truth *set* over the world. A sort of "end-of-the-world phantasy" as is met with in certain schizophrenics, closes this tale of revenge; but it is a phantasy in which the Father, as the gory castrator and killer, a God terrible and everlasting, reigns solitary in a void world. "And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all." *Vengeance is mine . . . saith the Lord.*¹

¹ *Deuteronomy*, XXXII, 35; Paul, *Epistle to the Romans*, XII, 19

CHAPTER XL

Never Bet the Devil Your Head

A Tale with a Moral¹

IN writing the title of this story and two first paragraphs, Poe doubtless imagined he was merely ridiculing those rigid critics for whom every literary work must and so, does, contain a moral. For which reason he offers

“the sad history appended;—a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale”.

Thus he hoped to “stay execution” and mitigate “the accusation” of never having written a moral tale, which had been brought against him by certain critics.

Poe, however, spoke better than he knew for, even more clearly than in *The Masque of the Red Death*, this tale reveals the genetic relation that links morality (Poe’s “moral”) with the sanctions imposed by the father; that father who anciently castrated and slew his rebel sons.

The late Toby Dammit, since childhood, had been the close friend of the narrator who often saw Toby’s mother strike him when a boy, though only to the further deterioration of his character. Was this, he asks, because the mother chanced to be left-handed and so flogged him “from left to right”? Whatever the reason, the fact remained that Toby’s “precocity in vice” was awful.

“At five months of age he used to get into such passions that he was unable to articulate. At six months, I caught him gnawing a pack of cards. At seven months he was in the constant habit of catching and

¹ *Never Bet the Devil Your Head: A Tale with a Moral*. *Graham’s Magazine*, September, 1841; *Broadway Journal*, II, 6.

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kissing the female babies. At eight months he peremptorily refused to put his signature to the Temperance pledge. Thus he went on increasing in iniquity, month after month, until, at the close of the first year, he not only insisted upon wearing *moustaches*, but had contracted a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets."

Thus, like Poe his creator, Dammit was precocious and given to anger, drink, gambling and rebellion against authority! No psycho-analyst would reproach Poe for tracing so far back his hero's propensity to rage, gambling—that masturbation-substitute—and above all, drink. Not even the infant's first sexual attraction to the opposite sex—here the mother—is omitted, indirectly recalled by Dammit's pursuit of "female babies." Poe, himself, as it happened, when very young, had a baby sister. Finally, crowning presumption, the precocious Dammit, at a year old, identifies himself with his father by wearing *moustaches*, that male and phallic attribute at which Poe so liked to scoff and, rebellious of authority, reveals a propensity to blasphemous oaths and bets in the name of God—or the Devil—surrogate of the father.

"Through this latter most ungentlemanly practice" (betting), "the ruin which I had predicted to Toby Dammit overtook him at last. The fashion had 'grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength', so that, when he came to be a man, he could scarcely utter a sentence without interlarding it with a proposition to gamble." Not that these wagers ever involved money, for he was "detestably poor", his poverty, we are told, being "another vice which the peculiar physical deficiency of Dammit's mother had entailed upon her son". (One thinks of the poor and ailing actress thus made responsible for every defect in the son.) Thus Dammit has every reason never to say "I'll bet you a dollar", and to confine himself to "I'll bet you what you please", or "I'll bet you what you dare", or "I'll bet you a trifle" or, "more significant still, *I'll bet the Devil my head*". With this latter form he is so pleased that he ends by never using another.

His friend, while thinking that Dammit runs little risk, his head being small—and thus "his loss" will be similarly small—nevertheless feels a certain unease, and seeks to stay the blasphemer's swift descent on the path of iniquity. Since all his efforts are vain, he desists, but continues to remain a singularly faithful friend.

"One fine day, having strolled out together, arm in arm, our route led us in the direction of a river. There was a bridge, and we resolved to cross it. It was roofed over, by way of protection from the weather,

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and the arch-way, having but few windows, was thus very uncomfortably dark. As we entered the passage, the contrast between the external glare, and the interior gloom, struck heavily upon my spirits. Not so upon those of the unhappy Dammit, who offered to bet the Devil his head that I was hipped. He seemed to be in an unusual good-humor. He was excessively lively—so much so that I entertained I know now what of uneasy suspicion . . . Nothing would serve him but wriggling, and skipping about, under and over everything that came in his way; now shouting out, and now lisping out, all manner of odd little and big words, yet preserving the gravest face in the world all the time . . . At length, having passed nearly across the bridge, we approached the termination of the footway, when our progress was impeded by a turnstile of some height. Through this I made my way quietly, pushing it around as usual. But this turn would not serve the turn of Mr. Dammit. He insisted upon leaping the stile, and said he could cut a pigeon-wing over it in the air . . . I . . . told him, in so many words, that he was a braggadocio and could not do what he said. For this, I had reason to be sorry afterwards;—for he straightway offered to *bet the Devil his head* that he could.”

At this moment, the friend, in “a nook of the frame-work of the bridge” . . . sees “the figure of a little lame old gentleman” who attracts his attention by a slight cough. He is clad entirely in black, his linen is irreproachable and his hair is “parted in front like a girl’s”. Also

“his hands were clasped pensively together over his stomach, and his two eyes were carefully rolled up into the top of his head.

“Upon observing him more closely, I perceived that he wore a black silk apron over his small-clothes; and this was a thing which I thought very odd.”

Once again the old gentleman coughs “*ahem!*” and the narrator thereupon draws him to Dammit’s notice.

Dammit is at once strangely discomfited and turns

“more colors than a pirate runs up, one after the other, when chased by a man-of-war. ‘Are you quite sure he said *that?*’ (ahem!) ‘Well, at all events I am in for it now, and may as well put a bold face upon the matter. Here goes, then—*ahem!*’ ”

Hereupon, the old gentleman seems pleased and, leaving his post, graciously limps forward and shakes Dammit’s hand.

“ ‘I am quite sure you will win it, Dammit,’ said he with the frankest of all smiles, ‘but we are obliged to have a trial, you know, for the sake of mere form.’ ”

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Dammit then takes off his coat, sighs deeply and, from then on, identifying himself with the old man, is only able to utter "*ahem!*"

"The old gentleman now took him by the arm, and led him more into the shade of the bridge—a few paces back from the turnstile. 'My good fellow,' said he, 'I make it a point of conscience to allow you this much run. Wait here, till I take my place by the stile, so that I may see whether you go over it handsomely, and transcendently, and don't omit any flourishes of the pigeon-wing . . . I will say, 'one, two, three, and away'. Mind you start at the word 'away'.' "

The old gentleman took his place at the stile, paused a moment in thought, "then *looked up* and, I thought, smiled very slightly, then tightened the strings of his apron", and finally gave the signal.

Dammit sets off at "a strong gallop". The stile is neither very high nor very low. The friend himself resolves that in no circumstance would *he* try to jump it, even were the old gentleman to ask! He does not care "*who the devil he is!*"! The bridge, "arched and covered in, in a very ridiculous manner" turns these words into "a most uncomfortable echo". But now,

"in less than five seconds from his starting, my poor Toby had taken the leap. I saw him run nimbly, and spring grandly from the floor of the bridge, cutting the most awful flourishes with his legs as he went up. I saw him high in the air, pigeon-winging it to admiration just over the top of the stile; and of course I thought it an unusually singular thing that he did not *continue* to go over. But the whole leap was the affair of a moment, and, before I had a chance to make any profound reflections, down came Mr. Dammit on the flat of his back, on the same side of the stile from which he had started. In the same instant I saw the old gentleman limping off at the top of his speed, having caught and wrapped up in his apron something that fell heavily into it from the darkness of the arch just over the turnstile . . ."

Thereupon the friend hastens to the unfortunate Dammit and finds he has been deprived of . . . his head. It has been cut off by a flat iron bar which horizontally braced the bridge about five feet above the turnstile. The old gentleman had evidently reason to smile when looking up before giving Dammit the signal.

Mr. Dammit "did not long survive his terrible loss" and even the homœopathists found themselves powerless to help.

"So in the end he grew worse, and at length died, a lesson to all riotous livers."

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His friend waters his tomb with tears, and works a "bar sinister" on his family escutcheon. The "transcendentalists" (whom Poe particularly disliked) having refused to pay the very moderate bill for the funeral, he has Mr. Dammit disinterred and sells his body for dog's meat.

* * *

Such, then, is this odd tale, in which again, as in the thousand others conceived in humanity's legends—the Devil appears associated with a bridge. Every country has numerous "Devil's Bridges". The reader may recall the Swiss legend of the "Devil's Bridge", which spans the Reuss near Andermatt. It tells of the strenuous efforts made by a man to bridge the torrent. All his labour, however, proves unavailing. Then the Devil appears and offers to build it in his place, but demands, in return, the soul of the first creature to cross it. The bargain is concluded and the Devil completes the bridge in a night. Thereupon the man causes a dog to cross. Outwitted, the Devil retires crestfallen and the man is left in triumph with the bridge.¹

Here is a rascal more cunning than Mr. Dammit and one who ends very differently. We may be sure that his psycho-sexual make-up, or that of those who created this legend, differed greatly from that of the impotent Poe.

Before, however, we analyse the case of Mr. Dammit, let us devote a word to the general symbolism of bridges. Little, to date, has been written on this subject and nothing, I need hardly say, before the findings of psycho-analysis. Two interesting papers by Ferenczi are almost all we have on this subject.²

A wide clinical experience of both neurotic and normal individuals enabled Ferenczi to establish the following conclusion after psycho-analysing numerous dreams and neurotic symptoms; namely, that the bridge would seem to be a usual symbol for the father's penis and one which serves to connect two bodies, two stretches of country, *bridging* the

¹ Cf. Julius Tischendorf, *Die Länder Europas (The Countries of Europe)*, Leipzig, Ernst Wunderlich, 1926.

² FERENCZI, G., *Die Symbolik der Brücke. Int. Zeitschrift. für Psychoanalyse*, 1921, VII, p. 211 f. *The Symbolism of the Bridge. Int. Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1922, III, p. 163 f. and in *Further Contributions to the Theory and Technique of Psycho-Analysis*. London, Hogarth Press, 1926.

Die Brückensymbolik und die Don Juan-Legende. Int. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse, 1922, VIII, p. 167 f. *Bridge Symbolism and the Don Juan Legend. Int. Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1922, III, p. 167 f., and in *Further Contributions to the Theory and Technique of Psycho-Analysis*. London, Hogarth Press, 1926.

space between. Thus, the two stretches of country linked by a bridge would symbolise the parents connected by an immense penis-bridge, their colossal dimensions in this picture deriving from the fact that the parents appear as giants to the child. The river, or water which the bridge spans, according to the general symbolism of water, once again represents the mother from whose amniotic waters all humanity emerged. Thus the mother is twice displayed: in the country to be reached and in the water to be crossed.¹

Ferenczi also records the analysis of a patient suffering from a bridge phobia and from delayed ejaculation. Neurotics with bridge phobias regularly suffer from potency disturbances. This patient enabled Ferenczi to obtain deeper insight into the symbolism which interests us here and the analysis, in fact, restored the following scene to the patient's memory; his mother, a midwife and devoted parent, could never bring herself to allow him to sleep anywhere but in her room, till he was nine. Even during his sister's birth he was present and, though he saw nothing, heard all that took place, which included the remarks of those attending on her and thus was aware of the alternate emergence and withdrawal of the infant's head. The anxiety which, more or less, always besets those present during a confinement was naturally communicated to the small boy, who thus identified himself with the tiny creature which, for many hours, was itself forced to experience that physiological anxiety which is destined to become the prototype of all our future anxieties in the oscillation between entering the world or seeking to retreat to the womb. This patient's bridge-phobia was rooted in that scene; fear of death being the most important element in his phobia. Now, it is our prenatal sojourn in the womb which creates the image in which man, unable to imagine his own annihilation, conceives survival after death. Crossing a bridge, in this patient's unconscious signified, therefore, "returning" to death, as Ferenczi succeeded in satisfying himself when he got his patient to cross one of the bridges over the Danube. For crossing, the patient clung to him all the way but, returning, only half the way, so greatly did his anxiety decrease on nearing the bank which, to him, seemed to represent life.

¹ In ancient Rome, the highest religious dignitaries were given the title *pontifex*, or bridge-maker (*pontem facere*). The real function of engineer which the "pontiff" once actually possessed (though this function must have been lost in fairly early times) does not alter the fact that the Roman *pontifex*, father-*imago par excellence* was, as his name shows, unconsciously endowed by that nation of builders with the essential attribute of the father, which we see the symbolism of bridges to express.

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In the same way that this patient, in reality, clung to his analyst and father-figure, so the neurotic, in the unconscious, clings to the father's penis in order not to fall back into the mother-representative water, *i.e.*, death. Death is thus, here, twice represented; once by the river bank and, again, by the water. So, too, the mother is twice represented; in her totality by the further bank and, in a limited genital sense, by the water. The same is true, too, of the father who, in his totality, is represented by the river bank and, again, by the bridge as penis symbol.

Thus, these two universal and symbolic forms which Ferenczi considered himself justified in attaching to bridges, each complement the other for if, in part, the bridge stands for the father's penis which unites the two parents and, again, for the path which leads from non-existence (death or the foetal condition, which are equated in the unconscious) to existence, or vice versa, neither concept contradicts the other. For it is indeed by the father's penis, or bridge, that we all pass from non-existence to existence.

The second paper by Ferenczi deals with an episode in the legend of Don Juan. Don Juan, it would appear, once lit his cigar from the Devil's, the latter on the further bank of the Guadalquivir. Ferenczi takes this as confirmation of his view of the symbolism of bridges for, here, the bridge-cigar would represent in even clearer fashion the giant, erect penis of the notable gallant, both in shape and by its burning, the latter symbolic of the flame of desire.

Such is Ferenczi's theory. Though impressive, we nevertheless cannot help feeling that much remains to be said.

* * *

I know a woman, masculine in temperament who, as a child, was often tormented by the following bridge-dream. She would find herself crossing a bridge over the Seine, slowly, irresistibly, and powerless to turn back. Yet, as she went on to the middle, the bridge seemed to become increasingly rickety. The parapet along one side had gone and there were now spaces between the planking for, strangely enough, the bridge was now planked so that the rushing water could be seen beneath. Finally, a last plank or two, hanging in air, was all that remained, whereupon the small girl would wake with indescribable anxiety.

In analysis it was found that this bridge, in the patient's unconscious did, in fact, represent the penis. This penis, however, was not that of the father, but of the mother or, more precisely—the child having lost her mother at birth—that of the wet-nurse who took the mother's place.

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One of the games the nurse played with this child was to ride her "horse-back" on her foot, thus producing in the little girl undeniably sexual sensations. The bridge was both foot and penis of this woman, and ended in thin air like her foot, as the child, irresistibly swept on by her sexual sensations, sat astride it. But this dream, like all children's anxiety dreams, only appeared when the secondary phase of infantile masturbation was repressed, namely between the third and sixth years, in which period this nurse was replaced by a strict governess. The child then naturally discovered the difference between the sexes, one so painful to the small girl and, largely due to this and the governess's prohibitions, like so many girls abandoned her infantile clitoris masturbation, every repetition of which more humiliatingly verifies that the clitoris is but a miserably truncated penis.

The ruined bridge in this nightmare re-echoed the notion that the clitoris or female penis was only a penis cut short. There is, however, another element here which must not be neglected, no more than in dreams or bridge phobias. The small girl identified her own "penis" with that of the nurse whom the bridge represented. Whereas her relation to the nurse, while danced on her foot, was originally *passive*, she soon began to wish for a more *active* relation to the latter, analogous to that of the boy, due to her own little *male* clitoris.¹ This little organ, however, is inadequate to possessing the mother-woman. This impotence as male of the small girl revealed itself in the crumbling bridge, which prevented her reaching the opposite bank. The child's only solution would have been to fall back into the waters from which she had emerged, *i.e.*, return to the mother's body, the desire for which, as frequently happens, was converted into anxiety. As Freud has written, ". . . for a man who is impotent (that is, who is inhibited by the threat of castration) the substitute for copulation is a phantasy of returning into his mother's womb".² This little girl's dream, a dream of masculine type, was in fact an impotency dream. And what impotence, in effect, is more total than that of the girl's, haunted as she is by regret for the missing penis? The primitive bisexuality inherent in us all, traces of which persist, more or less, in our psychic and physical make-ups, enables girls to respond in masculine fashion just as boys

¹ Cf. A. (read Jeanne) LAMPL-DE-GROOT. *The Evolution of the Oedipus Complex in Women*, *Int. Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 1928, IX, trans. from *Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Oedipuskomplexes der Frau*: *Int. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, 1927, XIII, Heft 3.

² *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, op. cit. page 312, note 1.

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respond in feminine fashion, as we shall see in the other tales we are to consider by Poe.

The case of the woman with which we have dealt throws interesting light on the general aspects of bridge symbolism and allows us to fill one of the gaps which we felt were present in the papers by Ferenczi, to which we referred above.

Ferenczi seems, in effect, to attach little importance to those *identification* processes which, as we think, enter largely into all dreams and phantasies connected with bridges. The child has seen, or imagined, the sex act of the parents and the son, in his ambition, aspires to *identify* his penis with the father's and build a similar bridge. Given his weakness, however, all he can do, in the unconscious, is to cling to the father's penis in order to brave the same path. But in the impotents' bridge-fears, we find more than an echo of retardation at a stage of infantile weakness, for clearly there is also present some carry-over of the father's Œdipal bans. It is forbidden, in other words, to *build a bridge* to the mother, as the father does. Though, in bridge-phobias, women suffer primarily because unable to identify themselves with the father in his relation to the woman, male adults though physically capable of so doing suffer, above all, from feeling they have no *right* to do so. Thus, the primitive wish for incest with the mother is converted into anxiety, and the subject fears he may fall into water—which, in reality, he desires—or even to cross a bridge, since each would symbolise the wished-for ravishing of the mother. That, however, is taboo and to flout it would endanger both life and penis. Ferenczi's patient, whose father, moreover, was a tailor, (cf. the tailor in *Struwwelpeter*, who cuts off small boys' thumbs), especially feared both castration and death. And it was crossing a bridge that Mr. Dammit lost both his head and his life.

* * *

We return, after this circuitous route, to our point of departure; the story in which the Devil, the bridge and Mr. Dammit each play their predestined part.

Whereas Don Juan, in the epic incident of the Devil, the cigar and the Guadalquivir, triumphantly lights his cigar from the very Devil's, the latter a typical father-figure and, as regards male potency, meets him on equal ground—(it is not said whose cigar stretched furthest across the river)—Mr. Dammit, confronted by the same diabolic father-figure, meets a quite different fate.

The bridge in our tale, too, is unusual: it is covered and dark and

shadowy within. Here, the bridge hardly seems to represent the father's penis spanning the mother-river but, more, a vagina stretched from bank to bank and acting as a bridge between the primitively conceived copulating parents. I am reminded of the dream of a man with ejaculatio præcox, (through fear, as analysis showed, of the castrating *vagina dentata*), in which a woman appeared, furnished, instead of the vulva, with a sort of projecting mica tube intended to receive the male organ. Due to unconscious memories of the phallic mother, in which all little boys once believed, the vagina was thus represented extroverted; a sort of compromise between vagina and penis.

The bridge Mr. Dammit enters would seem to represent the similarly extroverted mother-vagina, a representation especially in accord with Poe's characteristic fear, apparent in all he wrote, of the *vagina dentata*. The story *Never Bet the Devil Your Head* would thus admirably illustrate the way each parent, in Poe's unconscious, behaves as castrator. Mr. Dammit enters the bridge-vagina in a manner "excessively lively"; then, as naturally happens when the penis enters the vagina, we see him "wriggling and skipping about" and exulting. When nearly over the bridge, just when we might say he is actually within reach of the further bank by the leap he is contemplating—this leap which perhaps is symbolic of the terminal ejaculation of coitus—the Devil appears. Mr. Dammit has taken the plunge, so to speak, his endless bets, doubtless, representing the risks he ran in daring to approach the mother in spite of the father. This time, however, the father has taken his bet and, if he fails, will claim his head; *i.e.*, penis. And it so happens that the son fails and drops, decapitated, before he can overleap the stile. Thus, the mother *vagina dentata*—for the fatal bar is but one of many that brace the structure—becomes the organ which, enforcing the father's Œdipal bans, effects castration.¹

The organ also, of death for, without even needing to reach the further bank, or plunge into the water, Mr. Dammit accomplishes the coveted return to the womb symbolised by river bank, water and death.

Ferenczi's theories and our own as to the symbolism of bridges are thus verified, in this tale, each in their fashion. On one hand, Mr. Dammit, entering the covered (vagino-maternal) bridge, is identified with the father's penis which followed the same road; identification

¹ The Devil, as father-figure, also bears some of the stigmata of castration—his girlishly parted hair and his limp. The classic club-foot of the Devil, like the blind eye of Wotan, may be compared with the filmed eye in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. The Œdipal father and the son's wish-castrated father seem here fused.

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doubly determined by the Devil's "ahems", reiterated by Dammit and, doubtless, assimilable with the male's explosive breaths during coitus. And again, Dammit is identified with his original state as a *fœtus* which emerged by the same road and now, reversing the process, returns by it like the father's penis, to merge once more with the mother in whom pre-natal and post-mortal meet. That Mr. Dammit never enjoys the supreme honour of reaching the maternal earth or the mother-waters, but miserably dies on the threshold of each, in the vagina, may perhaps be read as a despairing confession of Poe's impotence, expressed in tragicomic terms.

In any case, Mr. Dammit is punished for his offence after the three archaic fashions which, phylogenetically, we may assume the primitive father inflicted on his rebel sons: Mr. Dammit is castrated, killed and eaten and his corpse will be thrown to the dogs; dogs often representing, in phobias, the totems of primitive man.

* * *

Something remains to be said of the friend-narrator, who might be compared with another "companion", namely Montresor in *The Cask of Amontillado*. Though the part allowed the latter is an active one, Mr. Dammit's friend is but a spectator. Apart from selling Dammit's corpse for dog-meat, he merely watches the steady downfall of his friend, brought about by the Devil-father assisted by the mother bridge-vagina.

Nevertheless, certain features connect Montresor and the friend. Both, primarily, escape by virtue of their moderation; one emerges safely from the cellar where he has buried his drunken, dissolute father-brother who too well loved the mother, loving wine; the other safely leaves the bridge, where his companion perishes for wishing to leap¹ a turn-stile while he walks sedately round. Both are sedate doubles of their dare-devil friends and illustrate that abnegation is the path to security. Poe might therefore well think that, as far as he was concerned, he had been wise to stay impotent.

This dual symbolism of bridges though, as it were, turned upside down, is met again in *The Cask of Amontillado*, for it is after passing "under the bed of the river", through a passage where "drops of moisture trickle among the bones", that Fortunato meets his fate.

Finally, special circumstances in Poe's own childhood have left their

¹ Leaping is a common sexual symbol; in French, the expression *sauter une femme* (lit. to leap a woman) is a vulgarism for the sex act.

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mark on this story of Mr. Dammit. Poe was born among players, and his mother and father were dancers, as well as actors. It is very possible that Elizabeth Arnold's suppositious lover was of the same profession. Now, Mr. Dammit bets his head on the success of a "pigeon-wing", and meets his death in its performance. Thus, the occupation of Poe's parents would here turn *leaping*, a common symbol for the sex-act, into a "pigeon-wing", Poe's personal symbol for it, as the child of stage-folk.

Similarly, in ending the tale, the bar *sinister* worked by the friend on the dead Dammit's escutcheon and indicative of illegitimacy, might well allude to the supposed illegitimacy of one at least of Elizabeth Arnold's children, namely Rosalie, with whom Poe, in supreme doubt of his mother's virtue, seems here to identify himself in shape of Dammit.

In these last three chapters we have considered tales in which we hear the mutterings of revolt against the father—tales in which it succeeds and tales in which it is defeated. In none does it fail, perhaps, so completely as in this tragi-comic story—which, all in all, is only tragic—of the bridge, the Devil and Mr. Dammit. The vanquished son is thrown to the dogs, a fate that is even spared Prince Prospero.

This tale, as Poe in the title and opening proclaims does, in fact, contain a moral; namely, that the father always, more or less, retains his power over his rebellious sons and that, if he does not always, as with Poe, doom them to impotence, he frequently deprives them of much of their male freedom and power. In fact, this is the price humanity must pay for that social asset, both precious and destructive, which has been so laboriously acquired through the ages by repeated punishments and enforced repressions, and which we know as moral conscience.

The
Struggle With Conscience

CHAPTER XLI

William Wilson¹

IN *William Wilson* it is no longer the conflict between father and son that is presented, for the introjection of the repressive father system is now accomplished. Here, our hero is battling against part of himself, that which derives from the bans of those in authority and becomes our moral conscience or *super-ego*.

William Wilson begins by confessing himself the most infamous of men, whose later years have taken "unto themselves a sudden elevation in turpitude". He intends, however, to spare us the record of his crimes and will content himself, feeling his end near, with relating how "in an instant . . . with the stride of a giant" he passed "from comparatively trivial wickedness . . . into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus".

He is, he says: . . .

"the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and, in my earliest infancy, I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character".

Thus does the hero begin by depicting himself in what is perhaps the most *autobiographical* of all Poe's tales.

Next Poe depicts himself as still with his "imaginative" and "weak" parents. There,

"I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions. Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me".

Poe could hardly have condemned his heredity more severely.

We are then transported to Stoke Newington, at that time a village,

¹ *William Wilson*: *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, October, 1839; *The Gift*, 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 8.

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and to that old Manor House School where Poe spent two or three years, between eight and eleven.

"My earliest recollections of a school-life are connected with a large, rambling, Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply-shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies, and thrill anew with undefinable delight, at the deep hollow note of the church-bell, breaking, each hour, with sullen and sudden roar, upon the stillness of the dusky atmosphere in which the fretted Gothic steeple lay imbedded and asleep."¹

This is that *Gothic* background which, as we saw, provided the setting for Poe's Berenices, Ligeias and Madelines. The description continues, charged with detail. Before our eyes, we see the "old and irregular house", the extensive grounds, the "high and solid brick wall" which encloses the domain and its even more "ponderous" gate, "riveted and studded with iron bolts . . . surmounted with jagged iron spikes". This gate was never opened save for the pupils' weekly walk and their morning and evening church-parades on Sunday. The head, Dr. Bransby, was also parson of the church and Poe shows him to us in the pulpit:

"This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy?"

It is said that Dr. Bransby was far from pleased to find himself thus mentioned and, in such a light, in *William Wilson*.² The portrait, however, is incorrect, for the Rev. John Bransby could not claim the dignity of Doctor nor did he whip his pupils. He was then a young, high-spirited man, fond of sport and much liked by his pupils.

The Rev. John Bransby, however, in taking offence at being libelled by his one-time pupil, could hardly have guessed its origin; namely, that as headmaster, he automatically became a father-figure to the young Poe. Nor could his very real kindness prevent his being merged with the ever-recurrent figure of John Allan who, though eliminated from the

¹ Cf. page 15.

² *Israfil*, p. 83.

hero's family in the tale, reappears fused with that of the headmaster. The latter is therefore presented, on the one hand, clad in "snuffy habiliments" and brandishing the rod which, at times, was wielded by the tobacco merchant and, again, as proclaiming the moral precepts of the "hypocrite", John Allan, from the pulpit.

Moreover, that same John Allan who, with a ferule, preached morality to his ward never, in fact, practised it. Did not Edgar, while at school in Richmond, before his visit to England, in all probability have a bastard son of John Allan's for a schoolmate? For we find his schoolmaster, William Erwin, in November 1817, writing to John Allan, then in England, claiming his fees for Edwin Collier, that son.¹ Later, John Allan had other bastards.² Small wonder that Poe, before so much vaunted virtue and so much hidden vice, should have exclaimed, ostensibly at the contrast between the two aspects of his Dr. Bransby: "Oh, gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!"

After describing in similar detail the endless windings of the old house and the long, sombre school-room, Poe-Wilson briefly considers, with admiring wonder, his own psychic development at this time.

"... I must believe that my first mental development had in it much of the uncommon—even much of the *outré*.³ Upon mankind at large the events of very early existence rarely leave in mature age any definite impression. All is gray shadow—a weak and irregular remembrance—an indistinct regathering of feeble pleasures and phantasmagoric pains. With me this is not so. In childhood I must have felt with the energy of man what I now find stamped upon memory in lines as vivid, as deep, and as durable as the *exergues* of the Carthaginian medals."

In such terms does Poe express his pride in his intelligence and precocity at this time. And what he says is just, save that here he confuses conscious with unconscious memory, and attributes to the former many of the capacities proper to the latter. Furthermore, Poe's pride makes him boast of being exceptional in this respect and superior to the rest of humanity whereas, in reality, it may be said of all that they have "felt", (not thought!), in childhood, with "the energy of a man", even though this period—to which our strongest and most determinant *emotions* belong—is always later buried, as a result of repression, so that all becomes "gray shadow" and "weak and irregular remembrance".

¹ *Israfel*, pp. 76–77.

² *op. cit.*, p. 58 and note 90.

³ The same word was used in connection with the orang-outang's crime.

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Here begins the action proper. William Wilson, a "marked character" among his schoolmates,

"gains an ascendancy over all not greatly older than himself, though with a single exception. This exception was found in the person of a scholar, who, although no relation, bore the same Christian and surname as myself;—a circumstance, in fact, little remarkable; for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right, to have been, time out of mind, the common property of the mob. In this narrative I have therefore designated myself as William Wilson,—a fictitious title not very dissimilar to the real."

May we not, in these details of the fictitious name, see a more or less unconscious memory that at Stoke Newington, as reported by Mr. Bransby,¹ as at earlier schools and at home, Edgar Poe was called Edgar Allan: *i.e.*, by another name than his own? And in the identity of this double who, though unrelated to the hero, yet, like a super-brother, bears his name and surname, see an echo of the bastard "brother" which Edwin Collier would have become to Poe, when the latter became John Allan's foster son?² But, as we shall see, this story probes much deeper.

Young as he is, this double of William Wilson's begins to thwart him in all directions.

"My namesake alone, of those who in school phraseology constituted 'our set', presumed to compete with me in the studies of the class—in the sports and broils of the play-ground—to refuse implicit belief in my assertions, and submission to my will—indeed, to interfere with my arbitrary dictation in any respect whatsoever."

Thus does Poe project his inner conflicts, and split nature, on the outer world.

That this split is *internal* is manifested by what follows: "Yet this superiority—even this equality—" (of the double's)

"was in truth acknowledged by no one but myself; our associates, by some unaccountable blindness, seemed not even to suspect it. Indeed, his competition, his resistance, and especially his impertinent and dogged

¹ *Israfel*, p. 83.

² A legend exists that David Poe did not die at Norfolk in 1810, as the one newspaper cutting we have would indicate, but eloped with a Scotswoman by whom he had a son—this son later becoming a school-fellow of Edgar's at Irvine and thus inspiring *William Wilson*. This legend has no foundation in truth. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 13).

interference with my purposes, were not more pointed than private”.

Moreover,

“I could not help observing, with a feeling made up of wonder, abasement, and pique, that he mingled with his injuries, his insults, or his contradictions, a certain most inappropriate, and assuredly most unwelcome *affectionateness* of manner. I could only conceive this singular behavior to arise from a consummate self-conceit assuming the vulgar airs of patronage and protection”.

No better description could be given of the stormy intrusion of the truculent spoil-sport, the *super-ego* or moral conscience, into the child’s life, nor of its genesis in the system the foster-parents imposed; a system at once tyrannical, tormenting and affectionate. Mrs. Allan was doubtless too weak to contribute much to the formation of her spoilt child’s *super-ego*; it was to his brutal adversary John Allan that fate reserved the task. We need not therefore be surprised to meet, in this double of William Wilson, which represents, as we shall see, the introjection of the moral bans imposed by the father, elements of mingled cruelty, persecution and affection. At first, John Allan, harsh though he was, in fact, in his way, had loved the boy Edgar. But now it is he, in part, in this representation of the moral conscience, whom we see re-embodied in this double of William Wilson. That Edgar, when about six, had gone to school with Edwin Collier, who was somewhat his senior and, as his “Pa’s” bastard partly his “brother”, might be the link which led to his thus personifying the father’s bans in the brother. In any case, their older schoolmates take the two William Wilsons for brothers, in view of their names and remarkable resemblance. They might, in fact, have been twins, since both were born on January 19th, 1813. But why does Poe, in this autobiographical tale—as also elsewhere—diminish his age by four years? May we not here, in this tale that deals with conscience, see some echo of the fact that it was when about four, after his adoption by the Allans, that Edgar’s *super-ego* really came into being?

“It may seem strange that in spite of the continual anxiety occasioned me by the rivalry of Wilson, and his intolerable spirit of contradiction, I could not bring myself to hate him altogether.”

And, indeed, it is not easy to hate oneself and Wilson’s double, though partly John Allan disguised as the inhibiting “brother” is, nevertheless, a John Allan introjected and so part and parcel of his ward: in short, integral to Poe as private conscience and *super-ego* and, in fact, his internal categorical imperative. Thus,

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"to the moralist it will be unnecessary to say, in addition, that Wilson and myself were the most inseparable of companions".

Nor will it surprise us to learn that Wilson can find only one vulnerable point in his rival, which

"lying in a personal peculiarity arising, perhaps, from constitutional disease, would have been spared by any antagonist less at his wit's end than myself:—my rival had a weakness in the faucial or guttural organs, which precluded him from raising his voice at any time *above a very low whisper*".

There could be no better description of the still voice of conscience whose dictates, as it were, are whispered.

His double now retaliates by annoying William Wilson beyond measure, which he does by continually reminding him of their identical names. The disagreeable feeling we experience in hearing that someone has exactly our name is common knowledge¹ and doubtless corresponds to a narcissistic wound to our feelings of uniqueness. But with William Wilson, as may be imagined, this disagreeable feeling attains almost the proportions of a persecution delusion. The double, moreover, does not confine himself merely to emphasising the identity of their names, for

"the feeling of vexation thus engendered grew stronger with every circumstance tending to show resemblance, moral or physical, between my rival and myself. . . . In a word, nothing could more seriously disturb me . . . than any allusion to a similarity of mind, person, or condition existing between us".

This total similarity, nevertheless, goes unobserved by the other pupils and is only perceived by the two individuals concerned, one employing it to torment the other.

"His cue, which was to perfect an imitation of myself, lay both in words and in actions . . . my gait and general manner were, without difficulty, appropriated; in spite of his constitutional defect, even my voice did not escape him. My louder tones were, of course, unattempted, but then the key, it was identical; *and his singular whisper, it grew the very echo of my own.*"

Their schoolmates, however, do not notice this perfect imitation. "Perhaps the *gradation* of his copy rendered it not so readily perceptible."

¹ Cf. FREUD, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, London, Fisher Unwin, 1914. Trans. from *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens*, 1904: *Ges. Werke*, Band. IV.

The super-ego, in effect, builds itself up gradually through childhood, and it is only slowly that the parental system is introjected and becomes of the same hue as our ego.

The paternal, educative, moralising—in a word, *Allanescque*—origin of Poe's moral conscience or, put otherwise, of William Wilson's double, is strikingly revealed in the following significant paragraph:

"I have already more than once spoken of the disgusting air of patronage which he assumed toward me, and of his frequent officious interference with my will. This interference often took the ungracious character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated. I received it with a repugnance which gained strength as I grew in years. Yet, at this distant day, let me do him the simple justice to acknowledge that I can recall no occasion when the suggestions of my rival were on the side of those errors or follies so usual to his immature age and seeming inexperience; that his moral sense, at least, if not his general talents and wordly wisdom, was far keener than my own; and that I might, to-day, have been a better and thus a happier man, had I less frequently rejected the counsels embodied in those meaning whispers which I then but too cordially hated and too bitterly despised."

Thus, growing older, Wilson's feelings for his double, which in earlier years might easily have become "friendship", end by turning into "positive hate".

One day, during a violent altercation between the two Wilsons, the narrator fancies he detects in the accent, air and general appearance of his double

"a something which first startled, and then deeply interested me, by bringing to mind dim visions of my earliest infancy—wild, confused and thronging memories of a time when memory herself was yet unborn",

years—doubtless later obscured by infantile amnesia—in which Poe's super-ego was only just coming into existence. To Wilson, it seems he already knew the being who now stood before him "at some epoch very long ago—some point of the past even infinitely remote".

And here we come to the critical scene in which the horrified Wilson recoils from the miracle of the introjected father-system which, loathe it though he may, is now part and parcel of his nature.

"One night, about the close of my fifth year at the school, and immediately after the altercation thus mentioned, finding every one wrapped in sleep, I arose from bed, and, lamp in hand, stole through a

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wilderness of narrow passages from my own bedroom to that of my rival."

He had long been plotting, as he confesses, an ill-natured practical joke on his rival. Leaving the lamp at the door, he assures himself that his double is asleep, after which he returns for the lamp and with it, approaches the bed.

"Close curtains were around it, which . . . I slowly and quietly withdrew, when the bright rays fell vividly upon the sleeper . . . I looked;—and a numbness, an iciness of feeling, instantly pervaded my frame . . . Were these,—*these* the lineaments of William Wilson? . . . Was it, in truth, within the bounds of human possibility, that *what I now saw* was the result, merely, of the habitual practice of this sarcastic imitation?"

For what William Wilson thinks he sees before him is *himself*, his beloved ego reappearing as the *super-ego*, born of the hated, introjected, father-system. "Awe-stricken, and with a creeping shudder", he extinguishes the lamp and flees, leaving "the halls of that old academy, never to enter them again".

But no better than Poe, at eighteen, fleeing from the Allans, could William Wilson, leaving his school, flee from himself, or free himself from that part of his nature which this voice of conscience represented; the voice emanating from parents and teachers which pursues us through life.

In vain, William Wilson strives desperately to rebel against this super-ego, but his personality is too split to allow either total revolt against, or utter submission to, his super-ego. Yet let us see how his ego which, at first, thinks itself liberated, begins to give itself up to the wildest promptings of instinct. "After a lapse of some months, spent at home in mere idleness, I found myself a student at Eton": for which read, I was sent by Mr. Allan to the University of Virginia, which here seems doubly represented, first by Eton and then Oxford.

"The brief interval had been sufficient to enfeeble my remembrance of the events at Dr. Bransby's, . . . I could now find room to doubt the evidence of my senses . . . The vortex of thoughtless folly into which I there so immediately and so recklessly plunged, washed away all but the froth of my past hours . . .

"I do not wish, however, to trace the course of my miserable profligacy here. . . Three years of folly . . . added, in a somewhat unusual degree, to my bodily stature . . . when, after a week of soulless dissipation, . . . I invited a small party of the most dissolute students to a secret carousal in my chambers."

William Wilson

Here we are reminded of those Poe held in Room 13, West Range, of the University of Virginia.

“We met at a late hour of the night; for our debaucheries were to be faithfully protracted until morning. The wine flowed freely, and there were not wanting other and perhaps more dangerous seductions . . .”

These last, though alluded to thus discreetly, were never part of the “orgies” held in Room 13! Yet, in Poe’s real, as in his fictitious orgies, the wine flowed and the revellers grew “madly flushed with cards and intoxication”. At length dawn comes and, just as Wilson is “insisting upon a toast of more than wonted profanity”, a “violent, although partial, unclosing of the door of the apartment” diverts his attention, and he hears “the eager voice of a servant from without” saying “that some person, apparently in great haste, demanded to speak with me in the hall”.

“Wildly excited with wine”, Wilson hastens to the vestibule.

“In this low and small room there hung no lamp; and now no light at all was admitted, save that of the exceedingly feeble dawn which made its way through the semi-circular window. As I put my foot over the threshold, I became aware of the figure of a youth about my own height, and habited in a white kerseymere morning frock, cut in the novel fashion of the one I myself wore at the moment. This the faint light enabled me to perceive; but the features of his face I could not distinguish. Upon my entering he strode hurriedly up to me, and, seizing me by the arm with a gesture of petulant impatience, whispered the words ‘William Wilson!’ in my ear.

“I grew perfectly sober in an instant.”

Wilson has recognised his double who, thereupon, disappears. May there not be, in this episode, some distant echo of his fears that the masters might interrupt, or memories of an actual interruption of, his orgies in Room 13—they having the right to enter the students’ rooms at all times? Or, even of John Allan’s wrathful arrival to remove his prodigal ward? All this, however, is internalised as the whisper of his moral conscience, the accretions of the paternal inhibitory system introjected in himself. This, amalgamating with the ego, had built up the super-ego which, by a faithful return to its source, is again externally projected as the double of William Wilson.

Despite, however, the “pregnancy of solemn admonition in the singular, low, hissing utterance”, and though “this event failed not of a vivid effect upon my disordered imagination . . .” it was as “evanescent as vivid”. By earnest enquiry William Wilson then learns that, as a result of

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"a sudden accident in his family", his double had moved from Dr. Bransby's academy the very afternoon he fled.

"But in a brief period I ceased to think upon the subject; my attention being all absorbed in a contemplated departure for Oxford. Thither I soon went; the uncalculating vanity of my parents furnishing me with an outfit and annual establishment,¹ which would enable me to indulge at will in the luxury already so dear to my heart,—to vie in profuseness of expenditure with the haughtiest heirs of the wealthiest earldoms in Great Britain."

A grandiloquent wish-phantasy, indeed, for what should once have happened! For, here, John Allan, so miserly to Edgar at the University, is ousted by parents whose prodigality allows their child an almost regal luxury!

Our heir, however, proves insatiable. Not only is he "excited by such 'prodigality' to vice", but it also leads him to cheating.

"It could hardly be credited, however, that I had, even here, so utterly fallen from the gentlemanly estate, as to seek acquaintance with the vilest arts of the gambler by profession, and, having become an adept in his despicable science, to practice it habitually as a means of increasing my already enormous income at the expense of the weak-minded among my fellow-collegians. Such, nevertheless, was the fact. And the very enormity of this offence against all manly and honourable sentiment proved, beyond doubt, the main if not the sole reason of the impunity with which it was committed."

Poe, here, no longer contents himself with describing his own excesses at the University of Virginia in gambling and drink but adds, doubtless, what his unconscious would have led him to do, had not his super-ego, projected at times as William Wilson's double, also inhabited his own breast. We do not, in fact, know whether Poe ever cheated at cards. Possibly he may once have tried without being discovered. But it is more likely that the disinherited heir of the rich John Allan gambled in hopes of mending his fortunes and was merely tempted to cheat.

William Wilson, however, has fewer scruples. After cheating successfully for two years, he plans a yet more ambitious coup on a new undergraduate reported as immensely rich. Lord Glendinning, for such is his name, is first allowed to win considerable sums. Then, however, William Wilson contrives what he intends as a "final and decisive" meeting, to which eight or ten others are also invited.

¹ Privileges which John Allan refused Edgar.

"We had protracted our sitting far into the night, and I had at length affected the manœuvre of getting Glendinning as my sole antagonist. . . The rest of the company, interested in the extent of our play, had abandoned their own cards, and were standing around us as spectators."

Glendinning, intoxicated, doubles and quadruples his stakes and loses ever larger sums. Visibly affected, his pallor becomes "truly fearful". Then . . .

"some expressions at my elbow from among the company, and an ejaculation evincing utter despair on the part of Glendinning, gave me to understand that I had effected his total ruin . . .".

Glendinning was not as rich as they had been led to believe.

Follow some moments of "embarrassed gloom", when,

"the wide, heavy folding doors of the apartment were all at once thrown open, to their full extent, with a vigorous and rushing impetuosity that extinguished, as if by magic, every candle in the room. Their light, in dying, enabled us just to perceive that a stranger had entered, about my own height, and closely muffled in a cloak".

In the now total darkness, the stranger speaks:

" 'Gentlemen,' he said, in a low, distinct, and never-to-be-forgotten *whisper* which thrilled to the very marrow of my bones, 'Gentlemen, I make no apology for this behaviour, because in thus behaving, I am but fulfilling a duty. You are, beyond doubt, uninformed of the true character of the person who has to-night won at *écarté* a large sum of money from Lord Glendinning. I will therefore put you upon an expeditious and decisive plan of obtaining this very necessary information. Please to examine, at your leisure, the inner linings of the cuff of his left sleeve, and the several little packages which may be found in the somewhat capacious pockets of his embroidered morning wrapper.' "

Thus, the same confessional urge which forced the murderer in *The Black Cat* to knock on the wall behind which he had immured his victim; which, in *The Tell-Tale Heart* drove the man with the lantern to reveal, to the police, the old man's heart beating beneath the floor; which, in *The Imp of the Perverse* caused the poisoner to cry his crime in the market-place; dictates the revelations of William Wilson's double, revelations no less compromising for being whispered. Here, conscience speaks, even to others, in its own true, *inner* voice and finds means to make others hear, though not by the way of the human voice nor by the symbolic scream of a cat.

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The double disappears, lights are procured and the trickster is seized and searched. In the lining of his sleeve are found "all the court cards essential in *écarté*" and, in his dressing-gown pockets, a number of packs "of the species called, technically, '*arrondée*' " (sic). Amid contemptuous silence, William Wilson is invited to leave. As he goes, he sees that the cloak of rare fur held out by his host is, in effect, the exact counterpart of his own and must have been left behind by his double... "Next morning ere dawn of day", Wilson begins "a hurried journey from Oxford to the continent, in a perfect agony of horror and of shame".

Now, he tells us, "*I fled in vain*". In Paris, Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Moscow and Egypt, everywhere his double—thus part of himself—pursues and checkmates his guilty designs, whether of vengeance, ambition, cupidity or passion. "Who is he?—whence came he?—and what are his objects?" Wilson continually asks and, why does he always hide his face?

Now, however, a complete reversal takes place in Wilson's attitude to his tormentor.

"Thus far I had succumbed supinely to this imperious domination. The sentiment of deep awe with which I habitually regarded the elevated character, the majestic wisdom, the apparent omnipresence and omnipotence of Wilson, added to a feeling of even terror, with which certain other traits in his nature and assumptions inspired me, had operated, hitherto, to impress me with an idea of my own utter weakness and helplessness, and to suggest an implicit, though bitterly reluctant submission to his arbitrary will. But, of late days, I had given myself up entirely to wine; and its maddening influence upon my hereditary temper rendered me more and more impatient of control. I began to murmur,—to hesitate,—to resist. And was it only fancy which induced me to believe that, with the increase of my own firmness, that of my tormentor underwent a proportional diminution? Be this as it may, I now began to feel the inspiration of a burning hope, and at length nurtured in my secret thoughts a stern and desperate resolution that I would submit no longer to be enslaved."

Thus, Wilson's ego, exasperated at the tyranny of his super-ego, plots to be free and, once more, we shall see the son and introjected father battling together, as in *The Masque of the Red Death*, *Hop-Frog* and *The Cask of Amontillado*, against the background of a masked ball.

"It was at Rome, during the Carnival of 18—, that I attended a masquerade in the palazzo of the Neapolitan Duke Di Broglio. I had indulged more freely than usual in the excesses of the wine-table . . ." and we know that drink disarms the moral censor and frees the instincts from inhibitions.

"The difficulty . . . of forcing my way through the mazes of the company contributed not a little to the ruffling of my temper; for I was anxiously seeking, (let me not say with what unworthy motive) the young, the gay, the beautiful wife of the aged and doting Di Broglio. With a too unscrupulous confidence she had previously communicated to me the secret of the costume in which she would be habited, and now, having caught a glimpse of her person, I was hurrying to make my way into her presence.—At this moment I felt a light hand placed upon my shoulder, and that ever-remembered, low, damnable, *whisper* within my ear.

"In an absolute phrenzy of wrath, I turned at once upon him who had thus interrupted me, and seized him violently by the collar. He was attired, as I had expected, in a costume altogether similar to my own . . . a Spanish cloak of blue velvet . . . a crimson belt . . . a rapier . . . a mask of black silk . . .

"'Scoundrel!' I said . . . 'you *shall not* dog me unto death! Follow me, or I stab you where you stand!'—and I broke my way from the ball-room into a small ante-chamber adjoining—dragging him unresistingly with me as I went.

"Upon entering, I thrust him furiously from me. He staggered against the wall, while I closed the door with an oath, and commanded him to draw. He hesitated but for an instant; then, with a slight sigh, drew in silence, and put himself upon his defence.

"The contest was brief indeed . . . In a few seconds I forced him by sheer strength against the wainscoting, and thus, getting him at mercy, plunged my sword, with brute ferocity, repeatedly through and through his bosom.

"At that instant some person tried the latch of the door. I hastened to prevent an intrusion, and then immediately returned to my dying antagonist. But what human language can adequately portray *that* astonishment, *that* horror which possessed me at the spectacle then presented to view? The brief moment in which I had averted my eyes had been sufficient to produce, apparently, a material change in the arrangements at the upper or farther end of the room. A large mirror, —so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait."

This, however, is but a momentary illusion. For it was Wilson, his double, who "stood before" him "in the agonies of his dissolution". Yet, there was

"not a thread in all his raiment—not a line in all the marked and

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singular lineaments of his face which was not, even in the most absolute identity, *mine own!*

"It was Wilson; but he spoke no longer in a whisper, and I could have fancied that I myself was speaking while he said:

"*'You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, hence-forward art thou also dead—dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist—and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.'*"

It was from this moment, in which, murdering his super-ego or moral conscience, that William Wilson saw "all virtue" drop from him, "in an instant . . . as a mantle", and passed "with the stride of a giant"—"from comparatively trivial wickedness . . . into more than the enormities of an Elah-Gabalus". No further details are given us of these crimes, beyond the fact that, because of them, the unparalleled infamy of their author's name was "bruited to the uttermost regions of the globe" in scorn and abhorrence.

* * *

It seems that Poe himself, to some extent, realised the symbolic significance of his tale and that is why, doubtless, *William Wilson*, though accomplished and beautifully written, impresses the reader less than most of Poe's other great tales. Symbolism, which for fullest effect must remain unconscious and so spontaneous and vivid, turns here, at times, into allegory, which derives from consciousness and so is deliberate and cold. Poe, here, was somewhat too well aware what he was writing; better, indeed, whatever he might say, than when composing *The Raven*.

Yet the deeper significance of *William Wilson* was far from clear to him; no more, in fact, than to his readers. As things were, all that content of the tale which does not treat of the clash between inhibitory moral conscience and instinct-dominated ego, but merges into the more general motif of the *double*, he could not consciously have appreciated.

Otto Rank's fine study of *The Double*,¹ which deals with many stories based on this theme, will shed some light on the matter.

For point of departure he takes the film based on a story by Hans Heinz Ewers, *The Student of Prague*. In this the hero is pursued and persecuted by his double, whom he eventually shoots, thereby killing himself. Rank then considers the motif of the double in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, after which, passing from Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl* (*The Man Who Lost His Shadow*) to *The Shadow* by Hans Andersen, he

¹ *Der Doppelgänger*, Imago, 1914, heft. 2.

returns to consider Hoffmann, Jean-Paul, Raimund, Oscar Wilde (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*), Maupassant's *Horla*, Musset's *December Night*, Poe's *William Wilson* and Dostoevsky's early story *The Double* (*Golyadkin*). For though the double appears as the shadow thrown by a body, an image reflected by a mirror or water or, again, as an identical being, the theme, basically, remains the same.

Rank then discusses the degree in which these authors, themselves, were dissociated beings and, eventually, comes to the origin and significance of his theme.

First, he observes that the primal concept of the *double* which follows a being, must come from the shadow the body casts. This double must very early have become the first image of the *soul* that would survive the body after death, for when it reclined in sleep or death, it lost its shadow and lay sad and alone, its soul or its shadow having departed. Thus, we talk of the "land of shadows".

Our images, reflected in water or mirrors would, phylogenetically, play a similar part. From whence, doubtless, the superstition that to break a mirror brings ill luck, this being equal to destroying oneself.

Essentially, however, this theme stems from our narcissism. The child, before its libido is projected upon external objects, centres it on itself and its body and it is to this first big primitive reservoir that the libido always tends to return, when it encounters obstacles in the outer world. In all these kinds of stories, the hero, though persecuted by his double is always, more or less, emotionally attached to it, too. William Wilson admits that "in the first years of our connection as schoolmates, my feelings in regard to him" (the double) "might have been easily ripened into friendship".

But our ambivalence to ourselves, present in us all, which may be regarded as a defence reaction to our narcissism, reveals itself in the no-less constant hatred felt by these heroes for their persecutory doubles. There would also seem to be here some echo of the brother complex, of the brother-rival for the mother for, as Rank shows, women always bring ruin to these heroes. Because of the beautiful Duchess Di Broglio, Wilson kills his double and, thereby, the nobler part of himself. But it is the basic narcissism of man that remains the *fons et origo* of the double *motif*.

Yet, though mankind first created the double in the image of his own reflection and shadow, in order to save at least part of himself, namely, his soul untrammelled by death, from the extinction men refuse to accept, that same double, following the familiar mechanism by which what was repressed emerges in anamnesis, becomes the herald of impending doom in certain of these legends. Just as narcissism, when seriously threatened

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by sex love,¹ emerges as the double and all our heroes, as we have shown, are destroyed through women so, writes Rank, the image of death, against which the double was originally meant to protect us, reappears therein. For superstition universally holds that the double heralds impending death, and that one cannot hurt it without self-injury.

If, however, we follow Rank through the descriptions of the diverse avatars of the double in the works of his different authors, we come to conclude that Poe's *William Wilson* occupies a place rather apart. True, the legend's essential elements are present; identical names, appearance and dress; as also the apparition in a mirror of the hero's double in place of himself, and the double's "spoil-sport" characteristics and death, which equally involves the hero's and so equates it with his suicide. "In me didst thou exist," as the second William Wilson breathes with his last breath. But in no other *double* in literature, possibly, do we find the lofty, moral and respectable aspects of character so stressed as here. It is generally far otherwise, for the double is most often worse than his original. In *The Student of Prague* it kills the adversary the student has promised to spare; in Hans Andersen's story the "shadow" has its owner and rival cast into prison so that it may marry his sweetheart; and Golyadkin's double in Dostoevsky's story robs him unscrupulously of his post and his Clara, and finally gets him shut up as mad, while itself triumphing in its evil.²

To understand these differences, we must remember, as Freud has shown, that the *ego* is intermediate between the *id*, reservoir of our primitive instincts, and the *super-ego* derived from the introjection of our parents and teachers, which will direct our lives with the same authority with which these loved and feared upbringers, in their time, directed the child's. Now, the split in personality from which the concept of the double derives, may occur in either direction; the *ego* allies itself with the *super-ego* and projects its worst drives outwards upon a wicked double who represents temptation—which double embodies the *id*; (this, according to Rank being the primitive form of the double motif) or, what would seem to be a later form, the *ego* joins forces with the *id* and flaunts its wickedness, in which case it is the fatal double which embodies the *super-ego*. *William Wilson* is perhaps the most extreme instance of this latter class, which also includes *The Picture of Dorian*

¹ Love, Turgeniev wrote in a letter to a friend, is the one passion that annihilates our ego. (Cf. Rank, op. cit., page 552, note.)

² We might also mention *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, in which the double so vividly embodies the hero's worst instincts.

Gray. Whereas Dorian Gray abandons himself to every vice, it is only his portrait that bears the stigmata of condemnation. Nevertheless, this double, which but reflects his hideous soul in place of the changeless beauty of his visage, is far from possessing the "elevated character", or the "majestic wisdom", so impressive in William Wilson's double; one far more representative of moral conscience.

Whether, however, the double be essentially *id* or *super-ego*, it always represents self against self. And though it is always the persecutor of the original whose reflection or shadow it is, this happens, Rank notes, by virtue doubtless of the mechanism which, in paranoia,¹ converts the first love-object into the imaginary persecutor as a result of attaching to it the feelings, transformed into their opposites, which that object formerly inspired. Love, turned to hate, is projected from within ourselves upon it.

Whom do we ever love better than ourselves and, who, in this manner, more than ourselves, may become our relentless persecutor?

It is here that the motif of "the double" impinges on the important and universal problem of homosexuality. For the double can only be of the same sex as the being from whom it sprang, and the same narcissistic roots underlie both the creation of the double and latent or manifest homosexual trends. In the story of *William Wilson* it was possible to see how just this observation is in cases where the double represents, not merely the projection outwards of our baser instincts, but the embodied *super-ego*. For, as we said at the outset and, in conclusion, repeat; if Wilson-Poe's double, in essence, is part of Poe-Wilson himself, externally re-projected, it is just that part which was constituted, so to speak, by Poe assimilating his educator and up-bringer, the "father" John Allan, to whom, despite his rebellion, his attitude always remained passive. It was the moral bans, the inhibitions inculcated in Poe by his education, which saved him from the fate of a William Wilson, while his moral passivity—in spite of his hate—also contributed to that end. This attitude, in Poe, in fact, amounted to passive homosexuality, as the tales we shall now analyse permit us to show.

¹ Cf. FREUD, *Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*. *Coll. Papers*, III, pp. 387-466. Trans. from *Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen über einem autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)*, 1911. *Ges. Werke*, Band. VIII.

Tales of
Passivity of The Father

CHAPTER XLII

Bedloe, Valdemar, and the Angel of the Odd

MR. AUGUSTUS BEDLOE, as once William Wilson and Edgar Poe, lives in a university city; that, indeed, where Poe himself studied—Charlottesville, Virginia. And there the narrator of *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains*¹ strikes up acquaintance with the mysterious individual, Augustus Bedloe, of whose family or origins nothing is known and who, though young, at times seems “a hundred years of age”. Here follows his description:

“He was singularly tall and thin. He stooped much. His limbs were exceedingly long and emaciated. His forehead was broad and low. His complexion was absolutely bloodless. His mouth was large and flexible, and his teeth were more wildly uneven, although sound, than I had ever before seen teeth in a human head. The expression of his smile, however, was by no means unpleasing, as might be supposed; but it had no variation whatever. It was one of profound melancholy—of a phaseless and unceasing gloom. His eyes were abnormally large, and round like those of a cat. The pupils, too, upon any accession or diminution of light, underwent contraction or dilation, just such as is observed in the feline tribe. In moments of excitement the orbs grew bright to a degree almost inconceivable; seeming to emit luminous rays, not of a reflected, but of an intrinsic lustre, as does a candle or the sun; yet their ordinary condition was so totally vapid, filmy and dull, as to convey the idea of the eyes of a long-interred corpse.”

It is as though an elder, phthisical brother of Poe's were here being described.

“These peculiarities of person” appeared to cause their owner much annoyance. He had not always been thus afflicted, having been formerly unusually handsome, but “a long series of neuralgic attacks” had reduced him to this condition.

¹ *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains: Godey's Lady's Book*, April, 1844; *Broadway Journal*, II, 21.

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"For many years past he had been attended by a physician, named Templeton—an old gentleman, perhaps seventy years of age—whom he had first encountered at Saratoga, and from whose attention, while there, he either received, or fancied that he received, great benefit. The result was that Bedloe, who was wealthy, had made an arrangement with Doctor Templeton, by which the latter, in consideration of a liberal annual allowance, had consented to devote his time and medical experience exclusively to the care of the invalid."

But what therapy does this physician employ? This, we are at once told:

"Doctor Templeton had been a traveller in his younger days, and, at Paris, had become a convert, in great measure, to the doctrines of Mesmer. It was altogether by means of magnetic remedies that he had succeeded in alleviating the acute pains of his patient . . . between Doctor Templeton and Bedloe there had grown up, little by little, a very distinct and strongly marked *rappor*t, or magnetic relation. I am not prepared to assert, however, that this *rappor*t extended beyond the limits of the simple sleep-producing power . . ."

Yet, this is just what *is* implied, as the rest of the tale makes clear. Indeed, it would be hard to think of a *transference* or dependence more complete than that of Bedloe on Templeton, where eventually

" . . . the will of the patient succumbed rapidly to that of the physician, so that, when I first became acquainted with the two, sleep was brought about almost instantaneously, by the mere volition of the operator, even when the invalid was unaware of his presence."

Furthermore,

"the temperament of Bedloe was, in the highest degree, sensitive, excitable, enthusiastic. His imagination was singularly vigorous and creative; and no doubt it derived additional force from the habitual use of morphine"—

as doubtless, at times, Poe imagined his own did. Bedloe takes opium

"in great quantity . . . without which he would have found it impossible to exist. It was his practice to take a very large dose of it immediately after breakfast, each morning—or rather immediately after a cup of strong coffee, for he ate nothing in the forenoon—and then set forth alone, or attended only by a dog, upon a long ramble among the chain of wild and dreary hills that lie westward and southward of Charlottesville, and are there dignified by the title of the Ragged Mountains".

* * *

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It is during one of these rambles, and under the effects of the morphine he has taken—a drug which generally predisposes its habitués to immobility, that an extraordinary adventure befalls Mr. Bedloe.

“Upon a dim, warm, misty day, towards the close of November, and during the strange *interregnum* of the seasons which in America is termed the Indian Summer Mr. Bedloe departed, as usual, for the hills. The day passed, and still he did not return.”

Templeton and the narrator thereupon grow alarmed, but about eight at night he reappears and tells the following strange story:

“You will remember . . . that it was about nine in the morning when I left Charlottesville. I bent my steps immediately to the mountains, and, about ten, entered a gorge which was entirely new to me. I followed the winding of this pass with much interest. . . The solitude seemed absolutely virgin. . .”

This ravine was so wild and desolate, and its entrance so completely hidden, that it was “by no means impossible” that he “was indeed the first adventurer—the very first and sole adventurer who had ever penetrated its recesses”.

The thick and heavy mist peculiar to the Indian Summer lay over all things and even obscured the sun. He could at no time see more than a dozen yards ahead and, soon, lost all sense of direction.

“In the meantime the morphine had its customary effect—that of enduing all the external world with an intensity of interest. . .”

Or, as we should more justly say: of projecting our hidden dreams upon it.

“In the quivering of a leaf . . . the faint odors that came from the forest . . . there came a whole universe of suggestion—a gay and motly train of rhapsodical and immethodical thought.”

Bedloe thus walks for several hours deep in his reveries, through a mist which has grown so dense that, at last, he is groping his way. An “indescribable uneasiness” now possesses him and he remembers

“strange stories told about these Ragged Hills, and of the uncouth and fierce races of men who tenanted their groves and caverns”.

Suddenly his attention is arrested by a drum heard beating through the fog.

“My amazement was, of course, extreme . . . But a new and still more astounding source of interest and perplexity arose. There came a wild rattling or jingling sound, as if of a bunch of large keys—and

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upon the instant a dusky-visaged and half-naked man rushed past me with a shriek. . . He bore in one hand an instrument composed of an assemblage of steel rings, and shook them vigorously as he ran. Scarcely had he disappeared in the mist, before, panting after him, with open mouth and glaring eyes, there darted a huge beast. I could not be mistaken in its character. It was a hyena."

Did Poe here forget that hyænas mainly live on corpses? In any case, this hyæna seems to enact the usual part played by so many animals in child phobias, where the son both fears and desires to be "eaten-up" by the father.¹ Mr. Bedloe, at sight of this African monster, thinks he must be asleep and dreaming. He therefore endeavours to rouse himself to consciousness, walks more briskly, rubs his eyes, calls out, pinches himself and bathes his head, hands, and neck in a small spring. Much revived, he then proceeds on his "unknown way".

At length, however, "quite overcome by exertion, and by a certain oppressive closeness of the atmosphere", he seats himself under a tree. A feeble gleam of sunshine appears and "the shadow of the leaves of the tree" fall "faintly but definitely upon the grass". Bedloe gazes wonderingly at this shadow, then looks up. The tree is a palm! Thereupon:

"The heat became all at once intolerable. . . A low, continuous murmur, like that arising from a full, but gently-flowing river, came to my ears, intermingled with the peculiar hum of multitudinous human voices".

Suddenly the fog is blown away "as if by the wand of an enchanter".

"I found myself at the foot of a high mountain, and looking down into a vast plain, through which wound a majestic river. On the margin of this river stood an Eastern-looking city, such as we read of in the Arabian Tales . . ."

Follows a description of this city, with its numberless streets, balconies, verandas and fantastic minarets. Bazaars display their riches and palan-

¹ Cf. especially FREUD, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (Coll. Papers, Vol. III). Trans. from *Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose*, 1918. *Ges. Werke*, Band XII; also the "gingerbread man" discussed in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* cf. pages 481-482). There Freud tells of a little boy who continually reverted to a terrifying phantasy of a gingerbread man pursued by an Arab who threatened to eat him. The Arab was a representation of the father, the gingerbread man the little boy himself, and the whole a phantasy of passive homosexual character on oral erotic lines. In such cases, to be eaten always signifies to be loved or caressed. We say "to devour with caresses".

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quins and elephants pass. Perhaps "a million of black and yellow men, turbaned and robed, and of flowing beard" swarm in the city, while the river, toward which "innumerable flights of steps" descend,

"itself seemed to force a passage with difficulty through the vast fleets of deeply-burdened ships that far and wide encumbered its surface".

Whereupon Bedloe interrupts his tale to assure his listeners it was no dream. Had it been so, he says, suspicion that he was dreaming would immediately have woken him up, as always happens. But since his vision persisted, he concludes, "suspected and tested as it was", he is forced to class it "among other phenomena". Here Dr. Templeton concurs and adds: "but proceed. You arose and descended into the city".

Bedloe, profoundly astonished by this awareness of his movements by one not present, then informed them that he was carried along by an immense throng, pressing onward in the same direction and exhibiting the wildest excitement. "Very suddenly," he says, ". . . I became intensely imbued with personal interest in what was going on . . ." Once he is in the city . . .

"all was the wildest tumult and contention. A small party of men, clad in garments half-Indian, half-European, and officered by gentlemen in a uniform partly British, were engaged, at great odds, with the swarming rabble of the alleys. I joined the weaker party, arming myself with the weapons of a fallen officer, and fighting I knew not whom with the nervous ferocity of despair."

Overpowered by numbers, the little party then seeks refuge in a sort of kiosk, from which they observe "an effeminate-looking person" escaping from an upper window of a palace "by means of a string made of the turbans of his attendants". He then, in a boat, gains the opposite bank of the river.

"I spoke a few hurried but energetic words to my companions", Bedloe continues, "and, having succeeded in gaining over a few of them to my purpose, made a frantic sally from the kiosk. . . ." At first the crowd retreats but then rallies.

"In the meantime we were borne far from the kiosk, and became bewildered and entangled among the narrow streets of tall overhanging houses, into the recesses of which the sun had never been able to shine. The rabble pressed impetuously upon us, harassing us with their spears, and overwhelming us with flights of arrows. These latter were very remarkable, and resembled in some respects the writhing creese of the Malay. They were made to imitate the body of a creeping serpent,

and were long and black, with a poisoned barb. One of them struck me upon the right temple. I reeled and fell. An instantaneous and dreadful sickness seized me. I struggled—I gasped—I died.”

Here the narrator interrupts to say:

“You will hardly persist *now* . . . that the whole of your adventure was not a dream. You are not prepared to maintain that you are dead?”

Bedloe, for all reply, hesitates, trembles and becomes fearfully pale. As for Templeton . . .

“He sat erect and rigid in his chair—his teeth chattered, and his eyes were starting from their sockets”.

Bedloe takes up his story:

“For many minutes . . . my sole sentiment—my sole feeling—was that of darkness and nonentity, with the consciousness of death. At length, there seemed to pass a violent and sudden shock through my soul, as if of electricity. . . In an instant I seemed to rise from the ground. But I had no bodily . . . presence. The crowd had departed. . . Beneath me lay my corpse, with the arrow in my temple, the wound on my head greatly swollen and disfigured. But all these things I felt—saw. . . Volition I had none, but appeared to be impelled into motion, and flitted buoyantly out of the city, retracing the circuitous path by which I had entered it. When I had attained that point of the ravine in the mountains, at which I had encountered the hyena, I again experienced a shock as of a galvanic battery; the sense of weight, of volition, of substance, returned. I became my original self, and bent my steps eagerly homewards—but the past had not lost the vividness of the real—and not now, even for an instant, can I compel my understanding to regard it as a dream.”

“Nor was it,” says Templeton solemnly,

“yet it would be difficult to say how otherwise it should be termed. Let us suppose only, that the soul of the man of to-day is upon the verge of some stupendous psychal discoveries . . .”

After which, Templeton produces a water-colour drawing, which he shows to Bedloe and the narrator.

The picture appears to be a portrait of Bedloe, who almost faints as it meets his gaze. For, dated 1780, it is the likeness of a dead friend of Templeton’s, a Mr. Oldeb, to whom the doctor had been closely attached in his youth, when in Calcutta under Warren Hastings. “When I first saw you, Mr. Bedloe, at Saratoga,” says the doctor,

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"it was the miraculous similarity which existed between yourself and the painting, which induced me to accost you, to seek your friendship, and to bring about those arrangements which resulted in my becoming your constant companion. In accomplishing this point, I was urged partly, and perhaps principally, by a regretful memory of the deceased, but also, in part, by an uneasy, and not altogether horrorless curiosity respecting yourself."

"In your detail of the vision," continues Templeton, you have described with the "minutest accuracy", the

"Indian city of Benares, upon the Holy River. The riots, the combats, the massacre, were the actual events of the insurrection of Cheyte Sing, which took place in 1780, when Hastings was put in imminent peril of his life. The man escaping by the string of turbans, was Cheyte Sing himself. The party in the kiosk were sepoys and British officers, headed by Hastings. Of this party I was one, and did all I could to prevent the rash and fatal sally of the officer who fell, in the crowded alleys, by the poisoned arrow of a Bengalee. That officer was my dearest friend. It was Oldeb. You will perceive by these manuscripts . . ."

here Dr. Templeton produces a note-book in which several pages appeared to be freshly written,

"that at the very period in which you fancied these things amid the hills, I was engaged in detailing them upon paper here at home".

About a week later, a Charlottesville paper announces the death of "Mr. Augustus Bedloe", adding the following note:

"Mr. B., for some years past, has been subject to neuralgia. . . In an excursion to the Ragged Mountains, a few days since, a slight cold and fever were contracted, attended with great determination of blood to the head. To relieve this, Dr. Templeton resorted to topical bleeding. Leeches were applied to the temples. In a fearfully brief period the patient died, when it appeared that, in the jar containing the leeches, had been introduced, by accident, one of the venomous vermicular sangsues which are now and then found in the neighboring ponds . . .

"N.B. The poisonous sangsue of Charlottesville may always be distinguished from the medicinal leech by its blackness, and especially by its writhing or vermicular motions, which very nearly resemble those of a snake."

The tale ends with a few words that pass between the narrator and the editor of this paper. The former points out that the final *e* has been

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omitted from Bedloe's name, but this, to the editor, seems a mere typographical error. The friend however, reflects on the strange and terrifying enigma that Bedlo, without the *e*, is Oldeb reversed.

* * *

Here, it would seem, is yet another story of a double, the equation now being Bedlo-Oldeb. But how different this story is from that of *William Wilson*! Here is no moral problem, nor moralistic conflict between instinct and repression; it is a simple reproduction of certain happenings, though distant in space and time; almost, as it were, a photograph.

What happened to Oldeb happens to Bedloe fifty years after. It is not a dream but, as Templeton declares, "it would be difficult to say how otherwise it should be termed". Nor is the old doctor mistaken, for the mechanisms that regulate unconscious thinking, so characteristic of dreams, are much in evidence here. As so often in dreams and opium-dreams, time and space here cease to exist.

But now let us ask what is its content and how much of Poe's life and work this dream-tale, invented by an opium addict, reveals; for so far, more or less, we have restricted ourselves to a connected outline of the story.

Let us therefore return to our first gloss, inspired by Poe's description of Augustus Bedloe. As we said, it was as though an elder, phthisical brother of Poe's were being described. And it may indeed have been the memory of Henry Poe, dying of tuberculosis in his brother's sight, under Mrs. Clemm's roof, that went to the making of Augustus Bedloe. His premature stoop, his bloodless complexion, his abnormally brilliant eyes, are all indicative of tuberculosis. Augustus Bedloe, however, is not only Henry but seems also to be Edgar. Like Edgar he wanders interminably, poet-fashion, amid the Ragged Mountains' ravines. Like him, he is an opium eater and, like both brothers, though mainly Edgar, his poetic gift is "singularly vigorous and creative". At the outset, both brothers appear to be fused in the single figure of Bedloe. When the tale ends, they have separated out, though connected by a supernatural identity, and appear as the dual Bedlo-Oldeb.

But let us approach the tale from another angle. Poe published it in April, 1844 and we learn from Hervey Allen¹ that, towards the end of his stay in Philadelphia, in 1843, Poe had delusions he was being persecuted. He mistakenly believed himself slandered by his old friend Wilmer

¹ *Israfel*, p. 569.

and deliberately exposed himself to his enemy Griswold's¹ malice, by going so far as to borrow money from him. A distinct element of paranoia thenceforth becomes apparent in Poe's character. Freud has taught us to see, in this tendency in men to believe or, wish, themselves persecuted by others, a conversion into its opposite of a homosexual attraction to men, projected on the imagined persecutor.²

Now this tale excellently illustrates this mechanism. What greater dependence of one man on another could there be than Bedloe's on the old doctor by whom he is "magnetized"? Freud has equally shown that the hypnotic power of the hypnotiser over his subject is, in essence, erotic. In effect, therefore, Augustus Bedloe is in a state of sexual or rather, homosexual dependence on Dr. Templeton, a father figure, if ever there was one.

With Bedloe, Templeton does as he likes. It was for the patient's good we are told and to relieve him of neuralgia, that Templeton acquired such power over him. None the less, however, does he remain the "persecutor". He conveys terrifying images and electric shocks from afar, as the imaginary persecutor is deemed to do by those with delusions of reference. Finally, when Oldeb's life ends by an enemy's poisoned, snake-like arrow, Bedloe's life, too, ends by the poisoned, snake-like leech applied by his father-doctor Templeton; a name of prophetic omen since, in each case, the poison enters by the temple.

Those familiar with the unconscious symbolisms revealed by psycho-analysis will recognise in this serpent, arrow or leech, a symbol of the piercing penis; in the poison, a general symbol of impregnation by semen; and, in the electric shocks, an equation with feelings specifically erotic. Insane asylums afford countless examples of such symbolic usages (snake and poison phobias, and the persecutory electric currents of hysterics and paranoiacs) which, interpreted, always reveal the same constants. There is no need, however, to seek such examples in asylums; traces of the same symbolism may be found in us all.

Thus Bedloe's homosexual fixation on Templeton appears multiplidetermined. The old doctor pierces the young man first by his magnetic "effluvia",³ acting like erotic-stimuli on the nerves and, finally, by his

¹ *Israfel*, p. 563.

² Cf. FREUD, *Psycho-Analytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia*, op. cit. page 555, note.

³ *op. cit.*: In the case here dealt with, that of Schreber, the voluptuous effluvia sent by God to Schreber are called by the latter, God's "nerves". Note that Bedloe has been treated by Templeton for "neuralgia".

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penis leech-serpent and its poison-semen. In the same way, Oldeb was killed and later Bedloe, in his effigy, by an enemy's poisoned, snake-like arrow, and we know how frequently, in the unconscious, *enemy* represents the father. We have here a classic delineation, in sado-phallic terms, of a passive homosexual relation to the father, which all small boys experience at some time and which persists in many men's unconscious. The poison enters by the temple, owing to the usual *displacement* upwards imposed by the moral censor. The enemy with the poisoned arrow is linked with Dr. Templeton by as close a bond of identity, paternal in nature, as the "brother" bond which links Oldeb and Bedloe, elder and younger brothers, both of whom fall victims to the doctor's ill-starred love.

Let us, however, return to Poe's biography. In Poe's life, Templeton had a prototype, as the dual father, in reality; Edgar also had a brother, Henry. Delicate, alcoholic and tubercular, Henry predeceased him while young (Oldeb died at twenty, Henry at twenty-four). In my opinion, the tuberculosis implicit in Bedloe's description, signifies the *passive, feminine attitude to the father*, for it was primarily his mother that the small Edgar watched dying of this illness and it was she whom, doubtless, he had seen in the arms of the unknown lover. Thus, it was, that the consumptive, dying brother, through his illness, could be identified with their mother and that Edgar, in *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains*, to express his own passive, feminine attitude to the father, could use as his stepping-stone the dead brother who, for him, was identified with that mother.

* * *

In support of this contention, let us quote from another of Poe's tales in which "magnetic" passivity to the father attains perhaps its maximum expression: namely, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*.¹

When Poe wrote this story, he was doubtless already Griswold's rival for Mrs. Osgood's affections,² having met her through Willis in the Spring of 1845. *M. Valdemar* appeared that same December, a fact which, possibly, throws interesting light on the events the story relates.

In it, the narrator represents himself as one of inquiring mind, a man much drawn to the study of hypnotism who, "about nine months" before

¹ *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar: American Whig Review*, December 1845; *Broadway Journal*, II, 24.

² "But Poe had a rival in her affections in Dr. Griswold, whom she transformed for the moment into an impassioned poet." (Quoted from Stoddard: *Israfel*, p. 682.)

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these events, suddenly asks himself why "no person had as yet been mesmerized *in articulo mortis*". Looking around among his acquaintance for a possible subject, he is "brought to think of" his

"friend, M. Ernest Valdemar, the well-known compiler of the 'Bibliotheca Forensica', and author (under the *nom de plume* of Issachar Marx) of the Polish versions of '*Wallenstein*' and '*Gargantua*'. M. Valdemar . . . is (or was) particularly noticeable for the extreme sparseness of his person . . . and, also, for the whiteness of his whiskers, in violent contrast to the blackness of his hair—the latter, in consequence, being very generally mistaken for a wig. His temperament was markedly nervous . . ."

Nevertheless, the narrator has only on two or three occasions succeeded in putting him into a hypnotic sleep.

"I always attributed my failure at these points to the disordered state of his health. For some months previous to my becoming acquainted with him, his physicians had declared him in a confirmed phthisis. It was his custom, indeed, to speak calmly of his approaching dissolution."

It is difficult not to suspect, in this "compiler", Poe's then rival, Rufus Griswold. The relations between Poe and Griswold were always to be strange—an odd mixture of attraction and hatred from Poe, and flattery and treachery from Griswold. A truly ambivalent relation, we should call it, upon which Poe's ambivalence to his "father", John Allan, seems, in part, to have been transferred. An ambivalence so complete, indeed, that Poe, who all his life suffered through being disinherited by John Allan, strangely reversed those rôles and made Griswold, his avowed enemy, his principal legatee and literary executor.

Now, in *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, the Griswold-Poe relation seems to be similarly reversed. The narrator of the tale is Poe, while Valdemar is Griswold his poetic and amorous rival and, thus, an Œdipal father-figure. He, however, it is, who is consumptive, as once was Elizabeth Arnold and as, at this time, was Frances Osgood, each thereby reduced to passivity to the father, which Poe now represented in the grim and horrible manner his tale tells. It is as though this attitude of erotic passivity to the father, to his magnetism and psychic influence, a passivity which even accepts death from his hands, is here rendered back and turned against him, as though part and parcel, in these new "magnetic" terms, of the primal Œdipus crime.

For, under colour of prolonging the dying M. Valdemar's life, what does the narrator, in fact, do? Summoned by M. Valdemar on the day before

his death, the narrator, there and then, hypnotises him. Though M. Valdemar, in fact, dies, his dissolution is suspended for seven months, during which time the dead man can merely move his hideous, black, swollen tongue and utter sounds as from the Beyond. When, at last, an attempt is made to waken him from his long trance, what was left of M. Valdemar is mere deliquescence. "Upon the bed . . . there lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome—of detestable putridity." Thus is the wish for the father's disappearance—a variant of the wish for his death—able to mask itself as its contrary; the wish to keep him perpetually alive. It is the same hypocrisy, in the unconscious, which speaks in contraries in the myth of the Wandering Jew, where the wish to kill the father is expressed in the form of eternal wandering and so, life.

In analysing these tales, our aim has been to adduce examples of that passivity to the father, of which the Bedloe-Templeton pair offers the concrete, perfect example. This theme is reversed in *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, where it is no less apparent, expressed in terms of emanations and erotised magnetism.

* * *

*The Angel of the Odd*¹ is sub-titled *An Extravaganza*; an extravaganza, however, as in all dreams where the manifest content seems absurd, which is thoroughly rational as regards the latent content.

It is a November afternoon and the hero of this tale sits alone, in his dining-room, before an open fire. He has just finished a hearty meal, and near him are "some miscellaneous bottles of wine, spirit, and *liqueur*". He then takes up a newspaper and falls on the following paragraph:

"The avenues to death are numerous and strange. A London paper mentions the decease of a person from a singular cause. He was playing at 'puff the dart', which is played with a long needle inserted in some worsted and blown at a target through a tin tube. He placed the needle at the wrong end of the tube, and, drawing his breath strongly to puff the dart forward with force, drew the needle into his throat. It entered the lungs, and in a few days killed him".

Here is a most uncommon example of a foreign body entering the lungs, but one not quite impossible. Our hero, however, immediately thinks it a hoax and falls into a great rage, though "without exactly knowing why". *He* is not the man to believe in all these "odd accidents" the papers report, he declares. We, however, remembering the arrow and leech in the story

¹ *The Angel of the Odd: An Extravaganza. Columbian Magazine, October 1844.*

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of Bedloe, would say that something in him rebels at this passive homosexual phantasy on an oral (*fellatio*), and sadistic (death by the penetration of a needle), level.

But now, a remarkable, rumbling voice, replies: " 'Mein Gott, den, vat a vool you bees for dat!' " After looking about him for some time, our narrator at last descries a fantastic figure before him at the table.

"His body was a wine-pipe, or a rum puncheon, or something of that character, and had a truly Falstaffian air. In its nether extremity were inserted two kegs, which seemed to answer all the purposes of legs. For arms there dangled from the upper portion of the carcass two tolerably long bottles, with the necks outward for hands. All the head that I saw the monster possessed of was one of those Hessian canteens which resemble a large snuff-box with a hole in the middle of the lid. This canteen (with a funnel on its top, like a cavalier cap slouched over the eyes) was set on edge upon the puncheon, with the hole toward myself; and through this hole, which seemed puckered up like the mouth of a very precise old maid, the creature was emitting certain rumbling and grumbling noises which he evidently intended for intelligible talk."

A typical drunkard's phantasy, we might say—this personage composed of kegs and bottles! But there is more here than this, for as we have had repeated occasion to observe, Poe's predilection for drink, as with all alcoholics, was primarily rooted in the oral-erotism of the suckling. Thus, we here see alcohol referred back to its source and incorporated in a form which, though fantastic, nevertheless lives. *The Cask of Amontillado* and that other no less symbolic cask surmounted by Pluto's successor in *The Black Cat*, here become the talking, walking wine-keg whose dangling bottle-arms, with necks foremost, recall abundant breasts.

Yet, this Angel of the Odd which, in such archaic fashion, personifies Poe's alcoholism, not only represents the mother but, in our opinion, the father too. The regression evidenced by this tale harks back to very early experiences at a time when the babe makes no distinction of sex, a regression which enables both parents to be condensed into this single, fantastic being. This "Angel", indeed, despite his euphemistic appellation, deals with his interlocutor in a characteristically brutal and father-like manner, reminiscent of John Allan. He is both insulting and offensive and frequently reiterates "you mus be so dronk as de pig". Also, he several times strikes him—again as though a John Allan. Sundry taps on the forehead "with the neck of one of the long bottles" soon put our poor wretch at his mercy, in spite of his efforts to ring for his valet, or to throw the salt-cellar at his visitor's head.

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Here we may recall the item anent the needle. Clearly, the bottle-arms of this "Angel" represent, at one and the same time, the mother's breasts and the father's penis—though we should not forget the between-step of the concept of the mother's penis, in which all small boys originally believe.¹ These various corporeal adjuncts, which stand in a sucking relation to the mouth, play their part in the unconscious generation of alcoholism, and reappear here.

Our hero's utter passivity to his visitor is now established. When he is struck, tears flow from his eyes as though he were a baby, whereupon the "Angel" relents and comforts him. He advises him, hypocritically enough, to drink less by diluting his drink and, by way of example, replenishes his goblet, already about a third full of port, with "a colorless fluid that he poured from one of his hand bottles"; thus, with a bodily secretion—milk, urine, or semen, even though these bottles are labelled *Kirschwasser*—which, as such, is a mark of love.

So the "Angel", like a mother, "more than once" feeds her child from her body and our hero, like a replete nursling, by degrees grows calm.

The "Angel" then explains that he is the genius who presides over "the *contre-temps* of mankind" . . . whose business it was "to bring about the *odd accidents* which are continually astonishing the sceptic". He refuses to admit any contradiction and the least sign of incredulity enrages him. Our hero, therefore, remains silent, leans back in his chair with shut eyes and amuses himself "munching raisins and filliping the stems about the room". Thereupon, the "Angel in a terrible passion", utters a mysterious threat and departs.

Now sundry "odd accidents" overtake our hero. At six, he must renew the policy to his Fire Insurance, at which time it expires but, since his clock shows five-thirty, he settles himself for a short nap. The clock, however, now stops, for the salt-cellar, hurled at the "Angel", missed its aim and broke the crystal, while one of the raisin stems, idly flipped, has lodged in the keyhole and stopped the minute hand. Despite all this, our narrator retires unconcernedly to bed and falls asleep while reading a work entitled *The Omnipresence of the Deity*; in other words, of the Father. He dreams that the Angel of the Odd has inserted a funnel tube in his throat and is deluging him with "an ocean of *Kirschwasser*", poured in a continuous flood from one of his long-necked arm-bottles. In his agony, he wakes just in time to see a rat drag his lighted candle into its

¹ Cf., FREUD, *Leonardo da Vinci, A Psycho-Sexual Study of an Infantile Reminiscence*, op. cit. pages 499-500.

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hole. The house goes up in flames and its owner is only saved by the crowd producing a long ladder. Yet, before he reaches the ground, a huge hog, somewhat resembling the "Angel" decides to rub itself against that same ladder and he is thrown and fractures an arm.

By this chain of *odd accidents* our hero loses his house, his fire insurance and also his hair, which is singed off.

He now seeks consolation in women and finds favour with a rich widow but, as he kneels at her feet, his wig is entangled in her hair. His baldness being thus disclosed, she turns from him in derision.

Thereupon he affiances himself once more. Encountering his betrothed in "an avenue thronged with the élite of the city", he is about to bow when a "particle of some foreign matter" enters his eye and makes him "completely blind". The lady is "irreparably affronted" by such "premeditated rudeness", and this "particle" costs him his second bride. Ironically attentive, the Angel of the Odd now arrives and removes the particle from his eye. Thus, like another William Wilson, our hero fails, and doubly, in his relations with women. He has also failed to master the earlier urethro-phallic auto-erotism implied in the theme of the fire. It is as though Poe were here confessing that his impotency was partly rooted in his passive attitude to the father. The particle in the eye makes a worthy counterpart to the needle in the throat, or the arrow through the temple.

In despair, our hero determines to return to the mother in the only way available to the impotent, and phantasies a return to the womb.

"I . . . made my way to the nearest river. Here, divesting myself of my clothes (for there is no reason why we cannot die as we were born), I threw myself headlong into the current."

A crow, which has eaten brandy-saturated corn and is therefore intoxicated, constitutes the sole witness of his exploit and flies off with "the most indispensable portion" of his apparel—his trousers. Unable to endure this pseudo-castration, our hero gets out of the water, slips his legs into his coat sleeves and pursues the felon. As his nose is in the air, he falls over a precipice but, in the nick of time, grasps the end of a rope depending from "a passing balloon".

To this he clings with one arm, since the other is broken. The balloon then rises and he shouts for help. No one hears and he is about to resign himself to his fate and drop into the sea, when a hollow voice sounds above and he sees the Angel of the Odd "leaning, with folded arms, over the rim of the car . . . with a pipe in his mouth". He seems quite unmoved by the plight of the unfortunate man at the end of his guide-

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rope and, in fact, drops a heavy bottle of Kirschwasser on his head and threatens him with another. Thus persuaded, the wretch declares his complete submission to the "Angel". He is willing to believe in the Odd, in the "Angel", in everything. But he cannot, in utter submission, make the sign the "Angel" demands—that of putting his right hand in his left breeches pocket—because his left arm is broken and because he lacks breeches.

Thereupon, the "Angel" cuts the rope and our hero flies headfirst down the chimney of his now rebuilt house, which happens to be precisely below. He returns to his senses in his own dining-room, in a manner which recalls Hans Pfaall suspended, head down, from his balloon, and his birth phantasy. Like a midwife, the Angel of the Odd severs the babe's umbilical cord, once the latter has admitted the father's omnipotence.

That this tale should be described, as indeed it is, an "extravaganza" is, doubtless, meant to convey that the manifest content conceals this latent idea: how extravagant, indeed, to equate father and mother, drink and milk, and fuse the fixation to one with that to the other.

* * *

The three tales here analysed—all based on passive attitudes to the father—were first published in 1844 or 1845, and cannot have been written much before. In proportion as paranoiac traits became more marked in Poe's character with advancing years, this theme reveals itself more prominently in his work. Its maximum expression is found in his last great prose work, *Eureka*. But, before we turn to *Eureka*, we must consider the tale in which this theme attains its strangest and most impressive heights: *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

CHAPTER XLIII

The Pit and the Pendulum¹

DOOMED by the Inquisition, victim of sadist Fathers, the narrator in this tale does not bother to tell us what heretical deed led to his condemnation and thus begins the tale:

"I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy, indeterminate hum . . ."

He swoons:

"Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe.

"I had swooned; but still will not say that all of consciousness was lost. What of it there remained I will not attempt to define, or even to describe; yet all was not lost. In the deepest slumber—no! In delirium—no! In a swoon—no! In death—no! even in the grave all *is not* lost. Else there is no immortality for man. Arousing from the most profound of slumbers, we break the gossamer web of *some* dream. Yet in a second afterwards, (so frail may that web have been) we remember not that we have dreamed. In the return to life from the swoon there are two stages; first, that of the sense of mental or spiritual; secondly, that of the sense of physical, existence. It seems probable that if, upon reaching the second stage, we could recall the impressions of the first, we should find these impressions eloquent in memories of the gulf beyond. And that gulf is—what? How at least shall we distinguish its shadows from those of the tomb? But if the impressions of what I have termed the first stage, are not, at will, recalled, yet, after long interval, do they not come unbidden, while we marvel whence they come? . . ."

We have quoted in its entirety this dissertation on "the gulf beyond",

¹ *The Pit and the Pendulum: The Gift*, 1843; *Broadway Journal*, I, 20.

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for there could be no more appropriate introduction—more appropriate indeed than Poe himself knew—to the narrative that follows. The states which Poe groups with delirium (in which the unconscious is in complete control)—sleep, the swoon, death, the grave—are, to the unconscious, so many regressions to a prenatal condition. That immortality of which all men dream and which would be incapable of realisation were “all” indeed “lost in the grave” is, primarily, the projection beyond death of that sense of immortality proper to all living beings which, itself, doubtless expresses the fact that the psychic or biological memory of the living can only deal with periods of existence. But, before life, as we know it, began, the life we entered upon with our first breath, there was a time when, though in one sense not *alive* we, nevertheless, did live though *buried* and sheltered deep in the mother’s body. And since, in the unconscious, neither annihilation nor nothingness exist, the moment we learn of this first abode, (a recognition helped by some dim instinct or biological “mneme”), our psyche builds on this knowledge to deny the annihilation we fear in our conscious minds. Our idea of life after death then becomes, as it were, a tracing of life before birth, so that eternal life is conceived on the pattern of embryonic existence. Before we were yet of this world, we lived a sort of mysterious, timeless, spaceless, hidden life of our own in the mother’s body, and such we consider will be our ultimate survival. Thus, primitive and ancient religions placed the abode of the dead underground; in a giant womb, as it were. The Elysian fields, like Tartarus, were caverns beyond the Styx. The projection of heaven to the skies, leaving the grave and hell to earth, results from a secondary elaboration of this theme.

To return, however, to this tale, Now, it is a veritable descent into Hell that the doomed man describes after his swoon which, as it were, has cast him back into a semi-embryonic condition:

“Amid frequent and thoughtful endeavours to remember; amid earnest struggles to regather some token of the state of seeming nothingness into which my soul had lapsed, there have been moments when I have dreamed of success; there have been brief, very brief periods when I have conjured up remembrances which the lucid reason of a later epoch assures me could have had reference only to that condition of seeming unconsciousness. These shadows of memory tell, indistinctly, of tall figures that lifted and bore me in silence down—down—still down—till a hideous dizziness oppressed me at the mere idea of the interminableness of the descent. They tell also of a vague horror at my heart, on account of that heart’s unnatural stillness. Then comes a sense of sudden motionlessness throughout all things; as

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if those who bore me (a ghastly train!) had outrun, in their descent, the limits of the limitless, and paused from the wearisomeness of their toil. After this I call to mind flatness and dampness; and then all is *madness*—the madness of a memory which busies itself among forbidden things.”

He now awakes, his heart begins to beat tumultuously and he recovers “the mere consciousness of existence”; then—but with what terror—the power of *thought*.

“So far, I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay upon my back, unbound. I reached out my hand, and it fell heavily upon something damp and hard. There I suffered it to remain for many minutes, while I strove to imagine where and *what* I could be. I longed, yet dared not to employ my vision. I dreaded the first glance at objects around me. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be *nothing* to see. At length, with a wild desperation at heart, I quickly unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I struggled for breath. The intensity of the darkness seemed to oppress and stifle me. The atmosphere was intolerably close . . .”

What better description of claustrophobia—certainly justified here—could be given? Infantile fear of the dark, suffocation, dampness, solitude and the sense of being closely imprisoned, combine to make this Inquisitor’s cell a perfect anxiety-determined womb-phantasy. To bear out our interpretation, let us here note the absence, throughout the account of his various tortures, of any reference whatever to feelings of cold, though we are told that the cell is damp, deep underground and that the prisoner, weak with pain and fasting, wears only a “wrapper of coarse serge”. We may also note the constant recurrence of references to sleeping.

The unhappy man, after remaining motionless for a while, seeks to exercise his reason. “. . . not for a moment did I suppose myself actually dead.” He knows however, that, though of rare occurrence, there was held an *auto-da-fé* the previous night. Why, then, was he spared?

“A fearful idea now suddenly drove the blood in torrents upon my heart, and for a brief period, I once more relapsed into insensibility. Upon recovering, I at once started to my feet, trembling convulsively in every fibre. I thrust my arms wildly above and around me in all directions. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move a step, lest I should be impeded by the walls of a *tomb* . . . I proceeded for many paces; but still all was blackness and vacancy. I breathed more freely. It seemed evident that mine was not, at least, the most hideous of fates.”

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Thus, with movements as of a child in the womb, the prisoner assures himself he is not buried alive. This terror, so intense in Poe, directly derives, as analysis always shows, from the unconscious wish to return to the womb, expressed in negative form as anxiety. From this torment our prisoner is to find no escape.

"And now, as I still continued to step cautiously onward, there came thronging upon my recollection a thousand vague rumors of the horrors of Toledo. . . Was I left to perish of starvation in this subterranean world of darkness; or what fate, perhaps even more fearful, awaited me? That the result would be death, and a death of more than customary bitterness, I knew too well the character of my judges to doubt. The mode and the hour were all that occupied or distracted me."

The prisoner now explores his cell by groping along the walls. He feels for his knife, with the idea of driving the blade into a crevice to mark his point of departure, but finds that his clothes are exchanged for "a wrapper of coarse serge". From this he tears part of the hem and places it on the ground.

". . . but I had not counted upon the extent of my dungeon, or upon my own weakness. The ground was moist and slippery. I staggered onward for some time, when I stumbled and fell. My excessive fatigue induced me to remain prostrate; and sleep soon overtook me as I lay.

"Upon awaking, and stretching forth an arm, I found beside me a loaf and a pitcher with water. I was too much exhausted to reflect upon this circumstance, but ate and drank with avidity."

Thus our prisoner, like the embryo in its "cell", is fed by an invisible Providence, though with less loving intent. Somewhat refreshed, he soon resumes exploring his prison and concludes that in circuit, though broken by many angles, it measures some fifty yards.

He now resolves to "cross the area of the enclosure". The floor is slippery, and he trips on the torn hem of his robe, and violently falls on his face.

"In the confusion attending my fall, I did not immediately apprehend a somewhat startling circumstance, which yet, in a few seconds afterward, and while I still lay prostrate, arrested my attention. It was this—my chin rested upon the floor of the prison, but my lips and the upper portion of my head, although seemingly at a less elevation than the chin, touched nothing. At the same time my forehead seemed bathed in a clammy vapor, and the peculiar smell of decayed fungus arose to my nostrils. I put forward my arm, and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a circular pit, whose extent, of course,

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I had no means of ascertaining at the moment. Groping about the masonry just below the margin, I succeeded in dislodging a small fragment, and let it fall into the abyss. For many seconds I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent; at length, there was a sullen plunge into water, succeeded by loud echoes."

The prisoner thus discovers the only exit from his prison to be this dreadful *pit* or abyss, whose symbolic meaning we shall see more clearly as we proceed.

At the same moment, a sudden opening and shutting, as of a door overhead, reveals how closely he is watched.

"Shaking in every limb, I groped my way back to the wall; resolving there to perish rather than risk the terrors of the wells, of which my imagination now pictured many in various positions about the dungeon. In other conditions of mind I might have had courage to end my misery at once by a plunge into one of these abysses; but now I was the veriest of cowards. Neither could I forget what I had read of these pits—that the *sudden* extinction of life formed no part of their most horrible plan."

After long hours of agitation and terror, the unfortunate wretch slumbers again. Again, on waking, he finds a loaf and pitcher of water at his side. Burning with thirst, he empties the vessel at a draught (again the horrors of thirst described, as in the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*). But the water must have been drugged, for

"scarcely had I drunk, before I became irresistibly drowsy. A deep sleep fell upon me—a sleep like that of death. How long it lasted of course, I know not; but when, once again, I unclosed my eyes, the objects around me were visible. By a wild sulphurous lustre, the origin of which I could not at first determine, I was enabled to see the extent and aspect of the prison".

He then discovers that his cell is only about half the size he supposed. This detail troubles him at first for, in his condition, his soul takes "a wild interest in trifles". Eventually, it occurs to him that, after his sleep, when exploring the vault, he must have retraced his steps and so covered a double distance.

"I had been deceived, too, in respect to the shape of the enclosure." It is less irregular than he imagined, while the angles felt in his circuit of the walls

"were simply those of a few slight depressions, or niches, at odd

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intervals. The general shape of the prison was square. What I had taken for masonry, seemed now to be iron, or some other metal, in huge plates, whose sutures or joints occasioned the depression. The entire surface of this metallic enclosure was rudely daubed in all the hideous and repulsive devices to which the charnel superstition of the monks has given rise. The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls . . .”

Though the outlines were distinct, the colours seemed faded and blurred. The floor was of stone, and

“in the centre yawned the circular pit from whose jaws I had escaped.

“All this I saw distinctly and by much effort: for my personal condition had been greatly changed during slumber. I now lay upon my back, and at full length, on a species of low framework of wood. To this I was securely bound by a long strap resembling a surcingle. It passed in many convolutions about my limbs and body, leaving at liberty only my head and my left arm to such extent that I could, by dint of much exertion, supply myself with food from an earthen dish which lay by my side on the floor.”

His pitcher has been removed, and the prisoner, “consumed with intolerable thirst”, is offered nothing but “meat pungently seasoned”.

“Looking upward, I surveyed the ceiling of my prison. It was some thirty or forty feet overhead, and constructed much as the side walls. In one of its panels a very singular figure riveted my whole attention. It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum such as we see on antique clocks. There was something, however, in the appearance of this machine which caused me to regard it more attentively. While I gazed directly upward at it (for its position was immediately over my own) I fancied that I saw it in motion. . . Its sweep was brief, and of course slow.”

Wearied with watching “its dull movement”, he turns his eyes and now sees several enormous rats issue from the well, allured by the scent of the meat. For some time the prisoner’s attention is distracted by efforts to scare them away.

“It might have been half an hour, perhaps even an hour . . . before I again cast my eyes upward. . . The sweep of the pendulum had increased in extent by nearly a yard. As a natural consequence, its velocity was also much greater. But what mainly disturbed me was the

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idea that it had perceptibly *descended*. I now observed—with what horror it is needless to say—that its nether extremity was formed of a crescent of glittering steel, about a foot in length from horn to horn; the horns upward, and the under edge evidently as keen as that of a razor. Like a razor also, it seemed massy and heavy, tapering from the edge into a solid and broad structure above. It was appended to a weighty rod of brass, and the whole *hissed* as it swung through the air.

“I could no longer doubt the doom prepared for me by monkish ingenuity in torture.”

The wretch has escaped the pit, image of hell, only to become the prey of “a different and milder destruction”. For the moment, let us keep to the simple lines of the narrative and postpone discussion of its latent symbolic meaning.

“What boots it to tell of the long, long hours of horror more than mortal, during which I counted the rushing vibrations of the steel?”

He has no means of judging passing time, and the pendulum goes on descending with tormenting deliberation.

“... it might have been that many days passed—ere it swept so closely over me as to fan me with its acrid breath. The odor of the sharp steel forced itself into my nostrils... I grew frantically mad, and struggled to force myself upward against the sweep of the fearful scimitar. And then I fell suddenly calm, and lay smiling at the glittering death, as a child at some rare bauble.”

The sufferer swoons into “utter insensibility”. But soon, awakening, despite the agonies he has experienced, feels a craving for food. As he puts what the rats have left to his lips, “a half-formed thought of joy—of hope” rushes to his mind and is as immediately forgotten.

“The vibration of the pendulum was at right angles to my length. I saw that the crescent was designed to cross the region of the heart. It would fray the serge of my robe—it would return and repeat its operations—again—and again. Notwithstanding its terrifically wide sweep (some thirty feet or more) and the hissing vigor of its descent, sufficient to sunder these very walls of iron, still the fraying of my robe would be all that, for several minutes, it would accomplish.”

Meanwhile, the pendulum creeps steadily down.

“I saw that some ten or twelve vibrations would bring the steel in actual contact with my robe, and with this observation there suddenly came over my spirit all the keen, collected calmness of despair. For the

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first time during many hours—or perhaps days—I *thought*. It now occurred to me that the bandage, or surcingle, which enveloped me, was unique. I was tied by no separate cord. The first stroke of the razor-like crescent athwart any portion of the band, would so detach it that it might be unwound from my person by means of my left hand.” Vain hope! The victim lifts his head and sees that the thong encircles his body” in all directions—*save in the path of the destroying crescent*”.

Yet the vague hope, revived in him by food, returns once more:

“For many hours the immediate vicinity of the low framework upon which I lay, had been literally swarming with rats. They were wild, bold, ravenous. . . With the particles of the oily and spicy viand which now remained, I thoroughly rubbed the bandage wherever I could reach it; then, raising my hand from the floor, I lay breathlessly still”.

Now the rats, with others from the pit, swarm over the prisoner’s body. And though he feels an unspeakable disgust, his hopes are proved not in vain.

“I at length felt that I was *free*. The surcingle hung in ribands from my body. But the stroke of the pendulum already pressed upon my bosom. It had divided the serge of the robe. It had cut through the linen beneath. Twice again it swung, and a sharp sense of pain shot through every nerve. But the moment of escape had arrived.”

With a steady, side-long, movement, the victim slides

“from the embrace of the bandage and beyond the reach of the scimitar. For the moment, at least, I was *free*”.

He is still under the eyes of the inquisition, however.

“I had scarcely stepped from my wooden bed of horror upon the stone floor of the prison, when the motion of the hellish machine ceased and I beheld it drawn up, by some invisible force, through the ceiling.”

What new torture is in store, he wonders?

“Something unusual—some change which, at first, I could not appreciate distinctly—it was obvious, had taken place in the apartment,”

and, for the first time, the prisoner becomes aware that there is an interval of about half an inch between the base of the walls and the floor of his cell. Through this fissure a sulphurous light enters and “. . . the mystery of the alteration in the chamber broke at once upon my understanding”. The coloured figures on the walls, formerly blurred, now assume

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"a startling and most intense brilliancy. . . Demon eyes . . . gleamed with the lurid lustre of a fire that I could not force my imagination to regard as unreal.

"*Unreal!*—Even while I breathed there came to my nostrils the breath of the vapour of heated iron! A suffocating odour pervaded the prison! . . . A richer tint of crimson diffused itself over the pictured horrors of blood. I panted! I gasped for breath! There could be no doubt of the design of my tormentors. . . I shrank from the glowing metal to the centre of the cell. Amid the thought of the fiery destruction that impended, the idea of the coolness of the well came over my soul like balm. I rushed to its deadly brink. I threw my straining vision below. The glare from the enkindled roof illumined its inmost recesses. Yet, for a wild moment, did my spirit refuse to comprehend the meaning of what I saw. At length it forced—it wrestled its way into my soul. . . Oh, any horror but this! With a shriek, I rushed from the margin, and buried my face in my hands—weeping bitterly."

Such to our victim, though doomed to die by fire, was the horror the pit inspired!

"The heat rapidly increased, and once again I looked up, shuddering as with a fit of the ague. There had been a second change in the cell—and now the change was obviously in the *form*. . . The room had been square. I saw that two of its iron angles were now acute—two, consequently, obtuse. The fearful difference quickly increased with a low rumbling or moaning sound. In an instant the apartment had shifted its form into that of a lozenge. But the alteration stopped not here—I neither hoped nor desired it to stop. I could have grasped the red walls to my bosom as a garment of eternal peace. 'Death,' I said, 'any death but that of the pit!' Fool! might not I have known that *into the pit* it was the object of the burning iron to urge me? . . . And now, flatter and flatter grew the lozenge, with a rapidity that left me no time for contemplation. Its centre, and of course, its greatest width, came just over the yawning gulf. I shrank back—but the closing walls pressed me resistlessly onward. At length for my seared and writhing body there was no longer an inch of foothold on the firm floor of the prison. I struggled no more, but the agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long, and final scream of despair. I felt that I tottered upon the brink—I averted my eyes—

"There was a discordant hum of human voices! There was a loud blast as of many trumpets! There was a harsh grating as of a thousand thunders! The fiery walls rushed back! An outstretched arm caught my own as I fell, fainting, into the abyss. It was that of General Lasalle. The French army had entered Toledo. The Inquisition was in the hands of its enemies."

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So this tale ends, on a sort of Cæsarean operation, performed by the general himself, to free our victim; the general embodying the *good* father in contrast to the *bad* fathers of the Inquisition.

* * *

Certain readers will doubtless opine it idle, after this résumé, to seek a "latent", complicated, involved significance beneath the manifest content. Poe's mind, they will say, clearly sadistic—a point we concede—evidently enjoyed imagining torments and horrors and excelled in their invention. Why introduce such absurd phantasies as that of returning to the womb, such as you mentioned earlier and others, doubtless as shocking, to come?

Nevertheless, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, like our dreams or reveries, is a kind of two-part song. True, exquisitely cruel torturers might indeed construct a cell with such walls of heated metal, a yawning pit, a descending, hissing pendulum, to end their agonising victim's days. None of this is impossible and the very *plausibility* of these terrors accounts, in part, for the horror the tale inspires. But none of this explains why Poe should choose, of all possible anxiety themes, particularly these: nor above all, why these piled-up horrors should make us shudder, when many a similar invention leaves us cold.

To bring this about, these atrocities, for Poe, must have been charged with that libido which wells up from the deepest unconscious sources and communicates conviction through works of art: only thus, by ways unknown to consciousness, can the author's unconscious speak to that of his readers. And though the terror-theme of the torture cell seems superficially self-explanatory, our analytic task is to reveal the anxiety theme on which it is built, which alone gives this fearful tale its poignant and enduring impressiveness.

Two great underlying themes, latent in Poe's unconscious, seem to have inspired *The Pit and the Pendulum*; one, the phantasy of the return to the womb, already mentioned, now, though not always, conceived in terms of anxiety; the other, ignored in our résumé of this tale, the son's homosexual and masochistic passivity to the father, similarly conceived in anxiety terms.

Yet a third theme will confront us in *The Pit and the Pendulum*; the vast, primary problem of the origin of anxiety, as yet far from biologically or analytically resolved.

Reverting to the first of these themes, the victim's imprisonment in his torture cell was, as we said, to be seen as a womb-phantasy. Phantasies of the sort are the common heritage of man. They figure in the dreams and

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other unconscious constructions of adults, as in the activities and behaviour of children. They should not, however, be confused with biological tendencies to regress to the foetal condition, a tendency doubtless common to all creatures which have experienced an amniotic existence.¹ This tendency reveals itself most clearly in their periodic need to sleep in darkness and at rest and often, even, in the prenatal position, another manifestation of which would be coitus, that partial return into the female body—complete return being only effected by one sperm cell. The penis only achieves a semi- and temporary return to our pre-natal bliss and the body, totally and as it were, by proxy, attains it in voluptuous pleasure.

Apart from these biological aspects, however, and returning to our specific theme, *phantasies* of a return to the womb, these psychic edifices—true, biologically based, as in general is everything pertaining to the psyche—begin to be raised as soon as the child suspects an earlier existence inside the mother's body.

But contrary, however, to what Rank advances in his *The Trauma of Birth*,² to which we shall later revert, the womb-phantasies of the adult or child are not necessarily anxiety cathected. Many are exceedingly pleasurable. I knew, for example, a small girl whose favourite game was "playing houses". Drawing chairs and tables together, she would cover them with shawls, thus making a dark, little, airless enclosure into which she would creep and remain for hours, ecstatically contented. No amount of persuasion, or efforts to make her play in the air and sunlight, could wean her from this game, which she always reluctantly abandoned. The analysis of this girl, in after life, showed that her childish game was a typical womb-phantasy. There only, in these little symbolic play "houses", could she recover the shelter and peace of the womb—for she had prematurely lost her mother. The phantasies she thus acted out, true in this instance to their origin, always remained a source of deepest pleasure, exempt from all anxiety. The same will be found true for many phantasies of this type, both in children and adults.

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¹ In this connection and for what follows, see FERENCZI's excellent essay: *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality*, *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, Vol. II, 1933, pp. 361-403; Vol. III, 1934, pp. 1-29, 200-222. Trans. from *Versuch Einer Genitaltheorie*, *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, 1921.

² O. RANK, *The Trauma of Birth*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929. Trans. from *Das Traum der Geburt*, *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, 1924.

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And now we must ask why this womb-phantasy which, given its origins, should be encompassed by calm, gentleness and blissful well-being is, in effect, so often anxiety-cathected and, so much so, as to become the anxiety-phantasm in excelsis. This it is, too, which lies at the roots of various claustrophobias and which, again, is expressed in that most fearful of all instances of morbid anxiety, fear of premature burial. It was this fear, in particular, which haunted Poe and inspired the terrible and epic vision described in *The Premature Burial*,¹ a vision in which all mankind's graves open to reveal the corpses feebly struggling in the faint phosphorescence of decay.

Rank has tried to answer this question in his book *The Trauma of Birth*. In it, he says, we all strive to return to that state of primal pleasure (*Urlust*) of the foetus in the womb; a condition in which we, as yet, know nought of painful or disturbing stimuli from without and bathe in paradisaical calm. But, in regressing to this point, we strike an obstacle in our path: the memory of the event which catastrophically ended that period and expelled us from this paradise; namely, birth with its concomitant affect, the earliest of our anxiety conditions (*Uranst*). Thus, whenever we are beset by memories of or yearnings for the lost paradise of the mother's body, the memory of that obstacle at once recurs and regressively opposes such return. Thus, these womb-memories, at every recurrence, are automatically re-invested with anxiety and the anxiety aroused by the menacing *pit*, as being the way the prisoner *must* issue, is attached to the *cell* that was once paradisaical.

At first sight, this would seem well to apply to our victim whose horror of the pit is such that, when the redhot walls contract about him, as though a womb, any death seems preferable—even fire and its “red walls”—to the depths of the pit which, rationally, may seem surprising to us.

Nevertheless, the possibility that such *psychological* memories of birth-anxiety exist admits of some doubt and, in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*,² Freud critically evaluates this venturesome, simple and possibly ingenious theory of Rank's.

The concept that physiological phenomena of birth, such as disturbed heart-beat and even asphyxia, are the prototypes of every later anxiety

¹ *The Premature Burial*. Appeared in August, 1844, in an unknown Philadelphia periodical; *Broadway Journal*, I, 24.

² *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. Op. cit. page 312.

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condition, was first formulated by Freud. It is expounded in the chapter on anxiety in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* and elsewhere.

Rank, however, differs from Freud in maintaining that birth-anxiety is a *psychic memory* which never deserts us and not one that is merely *physiological*. Where, as Freud said to me, it is impossible to follow Rank, is when he claims that the embryo so distinctly *remembers* its passage through the vagina, that the female genitals thereafter remain, for all mankind, anxiety-cathected. As a result, the cardinal castration-anxiety is pushed into the background, though responsible, far more often than birth-anxiety, for the fears associated, in the unconscious, with that forever gaping "wound", the vagina.

Furthermore, in womb-phantasies anxiety-cathected, (which we must remember is not always the case), there enter anxiety factors other than those which originate in the "memory" of birth. Such phantasies in adults and, even, children do not exist alone, and other anxieties have been or will be experienced, as Freud chronologically systematises in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*. Birth-anxiety, for instance, is succeeded by separation-anxiety, whenever the mother absents herself from the child. Later, there appear castration fears, inspired by our upbringers, linked with the repression of our infantile sexuality. Follows the anxiety derived from conscience, issuing from the introjection of the menaces of these same upbringers and, lastly, fear of death which derives from the ego narcissistically fearful for its survival, once it has learnt that death exists: that death which the unconscious never admits. All these forms of anxiety may, through regression, fuse with womb-phantasies and that, so closely, that often it is difficult to separate them at first sight.

* * *

To return, however, to our analysis of *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

By the villainy of the Inquisitors (who, a sort of royal "we", represent the infinitely multiplied Father), a poor wretch is doomed to a terrible punishment, certain to end in death. His crime was that he did not believe in them blindly, or submit, utterly, to their will: in short, he is guilty of heresy against the Father. But death and its approaches, here, take the form—one constant in the unconscious—of the return to the womb and that primal foetal condition on which imagination models our future state. This wretch is immured in a deep underground cell, dark and damp though, strangely enough, he appears to have no sensation of cold. And indeed, towards the end of the tale, the then *red* walls will

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throw out a burning heat and, like a giant womb, begin to contract, as though to force the embryo towards the cloacal abyss.

Let us not anticipate, however. First, the doomed man miraculously escapes the pit, or premature birth, as it were. He, nevertheless, remains imprisoned, hidden and protected in the anxiety-causing womb of his grim cell. These events, and their accompanying emotions are interrupted, from time to time, by periods of semi-return to a foetal condition; sudden lapses into deep, dreamless slumbers from which the prisoner always awakes starving but, mostly, dying of thirst. Possibly here, too, we find a memory, as in the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, of what the little under-nourished Edgar suffered, as a result of his mother's inadequate milk?

Now, after his first escape from the cloacal birth-gulf, the prisoner wakes to find himself surrounded by sulphurous figures which cover his cell-walls: hideous demons that recall the animal totems which represent the Father in primitive minds. And when the victim lifts his eyes what, in fact, he discovers is, indeed, the castrating Father in excelsis; Time with his scythe. Yet though, in his prison, our victim is alone and desperately far from help and, though, to a certain extent, his horror of the dark corresponds to what Freud so well expresses as regards the child's fear of dark—separation from the mother and loss of her protection¹—our victim is not, in fact, alone, for the dread eyes of invisible Fathers, from their hiding place, watch his every movement, while over and above him is the castrating Father; Time with his scythe.

But this theme of a pendulum, a huge clock, and a murderous weapon of steel, does not now appear, in Poe's work, for the first time. In *A Predicament. The Scythe of Time*,² the eyes of Signora Psyche Zenobia are forced from their sockets, and her head is cut off, by the minute hand of a cathedral clock. Thus, two classic castration symbols are here juxtaposed and applied to a woman, as in *The Black Cat*. In *The Masque of The Red Death*, the great melancholy clock, with its sinister chime and weighty pendulum, the double of the spectre of doom at its side, was the father-symbol heralding the son's overthrow. Nowhere, however, does the son appear so defenceless, so masochistically delivered up to the father, as in

¹ Cf. *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p. 340. A child is afraid in the dark and asks its aunt to speak to it. "If someone talks, it gets lighter". London, Allen & Unwin, 2nd Edn., 1933. Trans. from *Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, 1916-17. *Ges. Werke*, Band XI.

² *A Predicament. The Scythe of Time. The American Museum*, December, 1838; 1840; *Broadway Journal*, II, 18.

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this pendulum torture in the Inquisition cell. Here is the son garrotted, swaddled like a new-born babe, lying on his low wood cradle. Around are the walls of his cell, substituting the womb of the mother. Above, triumphant, is Father Time, with his pendulum-scythe.

And now, what does this phantasy recall? Many, in fact, often met in clinical analysis, whether of men or women. These, strange as it may seem to those unfamiliar with the phantasy-world of the unconscious, all reproduce a certain imaginary situation: that of the child imagining itself still in the womb and—thence—witnessing the parents' coitus. This phantasy, analytically expressed, is termed *intra-uterine observation of coitus*. Obviously, the word "memory" cannot be used here. What we have before us is clearly a phantasy, generally built up after the child has observed the coitus of adults and then, by regression, retrojected on the past.

But what instinctual stimulus, what unconscious wish can have engendered this phantasy, for phantasies are no more fortuitous than dreams? We shall find, as might be expected, that the unconscious wish, thus expressed, is sexually determined and specific to the individual's libido. A child which has observed adult coitus, in effect, by virtue of latent and responsive instinctual mechanisms, identifies itself with each of the partners in the act, though such identification tends to be made with male or female in proportion as female or male elements are dominant in the child. Biologically, no individual is wholly male or female and all creatures, more or less, would seem bisexual, males presenting feminine features and females male: a fact confirmed by embryology, anatomy and physiology. Similar testimony from psycho-analysis and depth psychology might be added, pending endocrinology's last and, possibly, conclusive word.¹

Nevertheless, in each of us, male and female are variously embodied. In men, a prime condition of health is the possession of maximum physical virility. But, in Poe, that condition seems to have been vitiated, for we know how poorly he defended that virility, and what a psychically inhibited, impotent individual he was. This, indeed, the phantasy of the tortured victim under the pendulum-scythe now, once more, indicates.

This first of Poe's great tales, derived from the theme of passivity to the father, must have been written at a time when his paranoiac attacks

¹ Cf. MARAÑÓN: *The Evolution of Sex and Intersexual Conditions*. London, George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1932. Trans. by W. B. Wells, with new appendix from *La Evolucion de la Sexualidad y los Estados Intersexuales*, Morata, Madrid, 1930.

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were beginning to be persecutory;¹ as Freud has shown, these are always rooted in homosexuality.

The homosexual nature of this pendulum phantasy is sufficiently clear: the pendulum, here, replaces the father's penis and its movements in coitus. Simultaneously with the mother, the child within is possessed and entered—or will be—by the father's penis and, given its bisexuality, can identify itself with the mother and, in imagination, possess the father's penis woman-fashion. All this in Poe, however, was associated with powerful regressive trends as well as strong moral disapproval. Poe thus, for the most part, remained fixated at the anal-sadistic stage reached when he lost his mother, that is, before three. Also, his upbringing had made him puritanical about sex. As a result, the father's act of possession is manifested in masochistically cruel and destructive forms, and the father's penis is equated with a murderous steel crescent which will enter and castrate the son, as it were, of his heart, whose throbbing, to Poe, as we saw in other tales, symbolised those forbidden sexual and phallic activities which inevitably entailed punishment. Libidinal passivity to the father and sex guilt are both, therefore, magnificently gratified in this tale.

Here, once again, we return to the problem of anxiety. What is the origin of the anxiety, of which this tale, as it were, is compacted? Birth anxiety, alone, cannot altogether account for it, despite the overpowering horror of the pit. Nor could separation anxiety, either, despite the victim's solitude and abandon to the dark. To me, it seems that the primordial anxiety in this tale is castration anxiety from which, more or less, stems both conscience- and death-anxiety. What menaces the victim, in the crescent of shining steel, is the slow castration-destruction of the heart—or substitute phallus. And the horror of the pit, too, may well be largely fear of castration since, to Poe, the female genitals were banned, terrifying, dentated and castrating.

All this tale, in fact, evidences Poe's invincible reluctance, dominated as he was by the castration threat, to accept the incest phantasies of his infancy and subsequent sexuality. There is a page in Freud's *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*,² which throws so much light on this anxiety-story we are analysing that we must quote it in its entirety. After showing how anxiety, neurotic or "real", always arises from the perception of some *real* danger, whether this be internal and emanates from instinctual menaces to the ego (neurotic anxiety), or external, arising from without

¹ Cf. *Israel*, p. 569; Poe's letter to Tomlin, August 28, 1843, in which he libellously attacks Wilmer for maligning him.

² Op. cit. page 312. note 1.

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("real" anxiety); he goes on to say, with special reference to castration anxiety:

"Ferenczi¹ has traced, quite correctly, I think, a clear line of connection between this fear and the fears contained in the earlier situations of danger. According to him the high degree of narcissistic value which the penis possesses is due to the fact that this organ is a guarantee to its owner that he can be once more united to his mother—*i.e.*, to a substitute for her—in the act of copulation. Being deprived of it amounts to a renewed separation from her and this in its turn means being helplessly exposed to an unpleasurable tension due to instinctual need, as was the case in birth. But this need whose increase is feared is now a specific one belonging to the genital libido and is no longer an indeterminate one, as in the period of infancy. It may be added that for a man who is impotent (that is, who is inhibited by the threat of castration) the substitute for copulation is a phantasy of returning into his mother's womb. Following out Ferenczi's line of thought, one might say that such a man, while endeavouring to return to his mother's womb vicariously—by means of his genital organ, proceeds to replace that organ regressively by his body as a whole."

Now, if ever anyone was "inhibited by the castration threat", it was surely Poe! It need not therefore surprise us that his whole opus abounds in instances of the womb phantasy, those "substitutes for coitus to the impotent", nor that they reach their zenith in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, that most significant and impressive of them all.

As we have seen, however, this tale does not merely tell of a return to the womb in the symbol of the underground cell, its cloacal pit and contracting walls. True, part of the tale is invested with the anxiety attached to repressed incest desires—the genital danger represented by the mother, or wife, here being expressed in typical impotency fashion, *i.e.*, in terms of foetal existence. And this face of the tale, aspected, so to speak to the mother is, at least, as anxiety-cathected—the pit being the victim's main horror—as the face aspected to the father. None the less, the father also plays an enormous part in this tale, as source of anxiety.

Doubtless, it was fear of the forbidden mother and thus, woman, which helped, libidinally, to turn Poe back to the father; a process facilitated by his marked bisexuality. In life, as in fiction, Poe only escaped the pit to be garrotted under the Pendulum. But neither there could he escape the castration threat that had made him stumble and recoil from the pit. Thus, all through life, the velleities of his ill-starred sexuality doomed

¹ Referring to *Thalassa: A Theory of Genitality* (op. cit. page 585, note 1).

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him to oscillate between these dual forces, the pit and the pendulum, each luring him on but each, also, the castrator. For, to find erotic pleasure in woman he would have had to brave the pit which, however, was so constructed, following the Inquisitors' (Father, God, Creator) "most horrible plan" that there no "*sudden* extinction of life" would be possible. There seems a distinct suggestion, here, that the pit was lined with sharp blades or cutting edges on which the victim would be torn and hung—in short, the pit was a "*cloaca dentata*". To find erotic pleasure in men, he would have, however, to behave as a castrated being, woman, and let the scimitar enter and split his heart—the scimitar replacing the phallus—but, against this, his male narcissism rebelled. Thus, the two forms of erotic satisfaction Poe's unconscious could accept—to one like him inhibited by castration anxiety and given his marked bisexuality—were each charged with anxiety; castration anxiety, in fact. The apparent invention, therefore, of *The Pit and the Pendulum*, but faithfully and biographically records Poe's bisexual oscillations between his male and female trends; trends which always encountered the castration threat as an insurmountable obstacle.

The victim only escapes the pit to be ligatured under the pendulum, and only escapes that to be redelivered, inescapably, to the pit, owing to the cell's womb-like contracting walls. Only General Lasalle; (possibly, to Poe's unconscious, a surrogate of the good General Lafayette, in contrast to the bad John Allan); only the good father, a *deus ex machina*, by a kind of Cæsarean operation, slits open the contracting walls and rescues his victim *in extremis*. This was the supreme wish-phantasy of Poe for, in effect, he was always to be tossed between these poles of his bisexuality with never a hope of escape.

In his life, Poe, who passed for the adorer of woman, thanks to his verse and ardent utterances was, in the depths of his soul, always flung back from his ecstatic attraction towards them to libidinal subjection to the male and, against this, the male in him constantly rebelled. The chaste and tender husband of the dying Virginia would leave her bedside for sudden and, at times, long drinking "fugues" with bosom cronies. More significant still, Poe, paranoiac and persecuted, as usually happens, remained attached to his persecutors and, oddly, wished always to renew his friendship with them. His lamentable visit to Thomas Dunn English to ask him to act as his second will be recalled, nor should we forget that it was his most treacherous and persistent enemy, Rufus Griswold, a man he had every reason to distrust, whom he desired to be his "executor"; a term one is tempted to take in its most literal sense!

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Such, then, was the passivity retained by Poe, the adult, to father-figures: such was the mould he had acquired in childhood under John Allan's roof, by contact with a rigid, powerful father whom he feared, hated, admired and, also, loved. His libido (markedly bisexual from the outset), must have oscillated continuously between Frances Allan the gentle foster-mother, and the dour husband; hatred, like love, creates libidinal fixation and Poe's inveterate hatred of John Allan as, later, of all father-figures was, on a deeper level, a confession of indissoluble attachment.

CHAPTER XLIV

Eureka¹

ALONG the facade of the great house bought by John Allan in 1825 with the money left him by his uncle William Galt, there ran two covered porches or galleries in the upper of which, besides a "splendid swing", beloved of the children, there stood a telescope through which the young Edgar delighted to watch the stars.² He was then about fourteen, a time of puberty and its troubles, which his "Helen" had already passed through, before she died the year before. Following a classic device of sex-repression, our adolescent took refuge in projecting his soul to the stars. The passion for astronomy in the young and in adolescents indicates an attempt, under educative pressure, to escape from the tormenting violence of "guilt" laden sex, and bathe in the calmness of infinite space.

A similar flight dictated the astral poem *Al Aaraaf* to the young soldier, Poe, on Sullivan's Island.

* * *

Poe's ancient love of the stars was to revive, after the death of his consumptive child-wife Virginia, at *Fordham*, in January, 1847.

We do not know whether, as one witness asserts Poe was, indeed, seen after this event, "at the dead hour of a winter-night, sitting beside her tomb almost frozen in the snow, where he had wandered from his bed weeping and wailing".³ Doubtless, the romantic and elegiac taste of the time would necessarily create such a legend in default of facts, as it had done before, when Poe, as a boy, was said to have haunted Mrs. Stanard's grave. What we do know, as Mrs. Clemm and others have testified is, that after Virginia's death, Poe experienced a period of intense depression followed by one of great exaltation, in which period *Eureka* was written.

¹ *Eureka: A Prose Poem*. New York, George P. Putnam, 1848.

² Cf., page 25.

³ C. C. Burr, quoted in *Israfel*, pp. 731-732, and above, page 141.

Eureka

Mrs. Clemm tells us that, at this time, Poe was unable to sleep and, that, fearful of the dark or being alone at night, Muddy had to spend hours at his bedside with her hand to his brow.

Says Hervey Allen:

"There was a rocky ledge overhung by maples near the house that he particularly haunted. And there was a walk along the aqueduct path that, to the northward, at High Bridge, suddenly seemed to leave the earth behind, leading out on to a succession of granite arches, where, in the daytime, one could then look out over a great sweep of landscape, filled with blowing woods, white villages, and meadows that rolled away northward into the highlands and islands about Pelham Bay; or sank away eastward into the far, shimmering mirror of the Sound, streaked by the trailing plumes of steamboats, and flecked with sails. Down in the little graveyard below him, Virginia slept in the borrowed tomb under the cypresses and pine trees. Out of the sea behind Long Island rose the moon."¹

During that summer of 1847, Poe must have wandered night after night under the stars. Virginia had but recently died and, doubtless, it was there that he dreamed his *Ulalume* and *Eureka*.

Ulalume we have already discussed.² No doubt that poem in which, as we saw, Poe confesses in symbolic and astral terms why he must always fail to achieve true union with woman, precedes *Eureka*. Astarte shines in the heavens, but the poet's way to her, through the cypress avenue, is barred by "the door of a tomb"—his dead love's tomb. We know that, for Poe, the original occupant of that tomb was his dead mother on whose image Virginia's was superimposed; she too, ailing and consumptive. Thereafter, a state of withdrawal from women, broken by desperate efforts to reach his "Astarte", characterised the last two years of his life.

On the one hand, in his life, we see a procession of women; Marie Louise Shew, Helen Whitman, Annie Richmond and Elmira Shelton, all vowed, by him,—like Astarte—to remain inaccessible. On the other, in his art, apart from the few poems that laud their praises, there rises the immense cosmic phantasy of *Eureka*. But in *Eureka*, at last, he achieves his supreme flight from Astarte.

"He never liked to be alone," Mrs. Clemm tells us in a passage which we have already partly quoted,³

¹ *Israfel*, p. 732, and above, pages 153-4.

² Cf. pages 143-153.

³ *Israfel*, p. 735, and above, page 141

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"and I used to sit up with him, often until four o'clock in the morning, he at his desk, writing, and I dozing in my chair. When he was composing *Eureka* we used to walk up and down the garden, his arm around me, mine around him, until I was so tired I could not walk. He would stop every few minutes and explain his ideas to me, and ask if I understood him. I always sat with him when he was writing, and gave him a cup of hot coffee every hour or two. At home he was simple and affectionate as a child, and during all the years he lived with me I do not remember a single night that he failed to come and kiss his 'mother', as he called me, before going to bed."

Nevertheless, in spite of this refuge sought and found in a woman—a woman, too, in whom was nothing of Astarte!—this work, created by Eddy under his Muddy's tender care, represents both the flight from and, repudiation of, woman.

* * *

Poe prefaced *Eureka* with the following dedication:

"To the few who love me and whom I love—to those who feel rather than to those who think—to the dreamers and those who put faith in dreams as in the only realities—I offer this Book of Truths, not in its character of Truth-Teller, but for the Beauty that abounds in its Truth; constituting it true. To these I present the composition as an Art-Product alone:—let us say as a Romance; or, if I be not urging too lofty a claim, as a Poem.

"*What I here propound is true*:—therefore it cannot die:—or if by any means it be now trodden down so that it die, it will 'rise again to the Life Everlasting'.

"Nevertheless, it is as a Poem only that I wish this work to be judged after I am dead."

Thus does Poe confound beauty and truth, intuition and knowledge, affirmation and proof. But even in the first lines of the preface his delusions of grandeur transpire; delusions which were to make him later declare that "the ground covered by the great French astronomer" (Laplace) "compares with that covered by my theory, as a bubble compares with the ocean on which it floats".¹

"I design," says Poe on the first page of *Eureka*,

"to speak of the *Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical—of the Material and Spiritual Universe:—of its Essence, its Origin, its*

¹ Poe to C. F. Hoffmann, *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 17, p. 302.

Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny. I shall be so rash, moreover, as to challenge the conclusions, and thus, in effect, to question the sagacity, of many of the greatest and most justly revered of men."

Two paragraphs later, he adds:

"My general proposition, then, is this:—*In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation*".

The whole passage is interlarded with capitals—a well-known psychiatric symptom.

After which Poe announces that, to illustrate this idea, he purposes

"to take such a survey of the Universe that the mind may be able really to receive and to perceive an individual impression".

There then follows a strange "discourse on method", which shows how little he was fitted for scientific thinking. Here, his taste for hoaxes and journalistic skits oddly inspires the discovery of a bottle floating on the *Mare Tenebrarum*, wherein is found a letter dated 2848. Now Poe had already declared that what is known as *demonstration* does not exist and, here, his mysterious correspondent from the *Mare Tenebrarum* seeks to develop this theme. "'Do you know, my dear friend,' says the writer, evidently addressing a contemporary:

'Do you know that it is scarcely more than eight or nine hundred years ago since the metaphysicians first consented to relieve the people of the singular fancy that there exist *but two practicable roads to Truth?*' "

Thus, Poe alludes to deductive and inductive reasoning and attributes the first to the school of Aristotle (called in the letter *Aries Tottle*, or *Ram*), while the second derives from that of *Bacon* (here called *Hog*). Follow some pages of laboured sarcasms at these thinkers, pages we need not regard, after which the author of the letter continues:

"'Now I do not quarrel with these ancients . . . *so much* on account of the transparent frivolity of their logic . . . as on account of their pompous and infatuate proscription of all *other* roads to Truth than the two narrow and crooked paths—the one of creeping and the other of crawling—to which, in their ignorant perversity, they have dared to confine the Soul—the Soul which loves nothing so well as to soar in those regions of illimitable intuition which are utterly incognizant of '*path*'.

“By the bye, my dear friend, is it not an evidence of the mental slavery entailed upon those bigoted people by their Hogs and Rams, that in spite of the eternal prating of their savans about *roads* to Truth, none of them fell, even by accident, into what we now so distinctly perceive to be the broadest, the straightest and most available of all mere roads—the great thoroughfare—the majestic highway of the *Consistent*? Is it not wonderful that they should have failed to deduce from the works of God the vitally momentous consideration that a *perfect consistency can be nothing but an absolute truth*?”

Poe then expounds, through his letter-writer, how the Keplers and Laplaces are, in fact, but great intuitives, an observation in which there would certainly be much truth were it not that he, at the same time, excludes those inductive and deductive methods which these great thinkers employed to test their intuitions against that final arbiter reality which, as it were, made them freemen of the world of science. Poe, like a true poet, confounds provable theories with day-dreams incapable of proof. True, intuition may also lead to dream states and, as we know, these can be thoroughly *consistent* in certain delusional conditions. After this digression, Poe once more reverts to his “legitimate thesis, *The Universe*”.

“This thesis admits a choice between two modes of discussion:—We may *ascend* or *descend*. . . Ordinary essays on Astronomy” rise from the Earth to the Universe, but Poe proposes to take the contrary course and *descend* from Infinity and God, as his starting points.

We then have a discussion on *infinity* which the mind finds impossible to grasp: a difficulty greater, says Poe, then that of conceiving *finite* space. Next Poe asks us to distinguish clearly between the concept of the Universe of *space* and that of the Universe *proper*. The latter, the Universe of space, alone would correspond to Pascal’s definition: “*a sphere whose centre is everywhere, the circumference nowhere*”.¹

* * *

Following these successive preambles, Poe eventually expounds his own cosmogony.

“As our starting-point, then, let us adopt the *Godhead*. Of this Godhead, *in itself*, he alone is not imbecile—he alone is not impious who propounds—nothing. . . Says the Baron de Bielfeld. . . ‘We know absolutely *nothing* of the nature or essence of God:—in order to comprehend what he is, we should have to be God ourselves.’

¹ “une sphère dont le centre est partout et la circonférence nulle part.” Pensées: II, 72, (1).

“*‘We should have to be God ourselves!’*—With a phrase so startling as this yet ringing in my ears, I nevertheless venture to demand if this our present ignorance of the Deity is an ignorance to which the soul is *everlastingly* condemned.

“By Him, however—*now*, at least, the Incomprehensible—by Him—assuming him as *Spirit*—that is to say, as *not Matter*. . . By Him, then, existing as Spirit, let us content ourselves, to-night, with supposing to have been *created*, or made out of Nothing, by dint of his Volition—at some point of Space which we will take as a centre—at some period into which we do not pretend to inquire, but at all events immensely remote—by Him, then again, let us suppose to have been created—*what?* . . .

“We have attained a point where only *Intuition* can aid us . . .”

Here Poe recalls his own definition of intuition:

“the conviction arising from those inductions or deductions of which the processes are so shadowy as to escape our consciousness, elude our reason, or defy our capacity of expression”,

and then asserts that an

“intuition altogether irresistible” forces him to conclude that “what God originally created—. . . that matter which, by dint of his Volition, he first made from his Spirit, or from Nihilism, *could* have been nothing but matter in its utmost conceivable state of—what?—of *Simplicity?* . . .

“Let us now endeavor to conceive what Matter must be, when, or if, in its absolute extreme of *Simplicity*. Here the reason flies at once to Imparticularity—to a particle—to *one* particle—a particle of *one* kind—of *one* character—of *one* nature—of *one* size—of *one* form—a particle, therefore, ‘*without* form and void’—a particle positively a particle at all points—a particle absolutely unique, individual, undivided, and not indivisible only because He who *created* it, by dint of his Will, can by an infinitely less energetic exercise of the same Will, as a matter of course, divide it.

“*Oneness*, then, is all that I predicate of the originally created Matter; but I propose to show that this *Oneness* is a principle abundantly sufficient to account for the constitution, the existing phenomena and the plainly inevitable annihilation of at least the material Universe.”

This statement he demonstrates later. Here, Poe merely confines himself to further details concerning the creative act of God the Father:

“The willing into being the primordial particle, has completed the act, or more properly the *conception*, of Creation”.

Thereafter, “the constitution of the Universe”. . . was

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“effected by *forcing* the originally and therefore normally *One* into the abnormal condition of *many* . . .

“The assumption of absolute Unity in the primordial Particle includes that of infinite divisibility. Let us conceive the Particle, then, to be only not totally exhausted by diffusion into Space. From the one Particle, as a centre, let us suppose to be irradiated spherically—in all directions—to immeasurable but still to definite distances in the previously vacant space—a certain inexpressibly great yet limited number of unimaginably yet not infinitely minute atoms.”

Whereupon Poe launches into a protracted, involved discussion of the manner in which God brings about this heterogeneous multiplicity in the Universe.

“Now, of these atoms, thus diffused, or upon diffusion, what conditions are we permitted—not to assume, but to infer, from consideration as well of their source as of the character of the design apparent in their diffusion? *Unity* being their source, and *difference from Unity* the character of the design manifested in their diffusion, we are warranted in supposing this character to be at least *generally* preserved throughout the design, and to form a portion of the design itself:—that is to say, we shall be warranted in conceiving continual differences at all points from the unicity and simplicity of the origin. But, for these reasons, shall we be justified in imagining the atoms heterogeneous, dissimilar, unequal, and inequidistant?”

And all this from the beginning? No, answers Poe, for we must reject any idea that God may perform acts of supererogation. When the very first atoms were dispersed, God must have been satisfied with a “difference in form” only, “all other differences”—their nature: size, and “inequidistance”—“arising at once out of these, in the very first processes of mass-constitution”.

Now let us turn back to something asserted by Poe when first presenting his theory that abnormal Plurality derived from an original and normal state of Unity. “An action of this character,” he then said,

“implies reaction. A diffusion from Unity, under the conditions, involves a tendency to return into Unity—a tendency ineradicable until satisfied. But on these points I will speak more fully hereafter.”

This he now does, and explains how:

‘although the immediate and perpetual *tendency* of the disunited atoms to return to their normal Unity, is implied, as I have said, in their abnormal diffusion; still it is clear that this tendency will be without

consequence—a tendency and no more—until the diffusive energy, in ceasing to be exerted, shall leave *it*, the tendency, free to seek its satisfaction. The Divine Act, however, being considered as determinate, and discontinued on the fulfilment of the diffusion, we understand, at once, a *reaction*—in other words, a *satisfiable* tendency of the disunited atoms to return into *One*.”

The Universe, however, would be wiped out as soon as created were this tendency to become fact. The Divine purpose of creating “*the utmost possible Relation*” would then be frustrated before it could be accomplished. Poe therefore imagines a third force which, with the forces of diffusion and attraction, composes the tripartite dynamism of the universe. This he calls the force of repulsion. Repulsive force, according to Poe, is *something* which allows the atoms

“infinitely to approximate, while denying them positive contact; in a word, having the power—*up to a certain epoch*—of preventing their *coalition*, but no ability to interfere with their *coalescence* in any respect or degree”.

The final aim towards which the completed Universe strives, none the less, remains this ultimate reunion with Unity or God, which amounts to the same. The sole function of this repulsive force is to delay that reunion.

“That the repulsive something actually exists, *we see*. Man neither employs, nor knows, a force sufficient to bring two atoms into contact.”

This is what is meant by the “impenetrability of matter”. Poe feels that this principle would appear from “a consideration of *Spirit in itself* for

“here the God has interposed, and here only, because here and here only the knot demanded the interposition of God.

“In fact, while the tendency of the diffused atoms to return into Unity, will be recognized, at once, as the principle of the Newtonian Gravity, what I have spoken of as a repulsive influence prescribing limits to the (immediate) satisfaction of the tendency, will be understood as *that* which we have been in the practice of designating now as heat, now as magnetism, now as *electricity*; displaying our ignorance of its awful character in the vacillation of the phraseology with which we endeavor to circumscribe it.”

Here follow certain ideas on the nature of electricity, which lead Poe to state the following law:—

“The amount of electricity developed on the approximation of two bodies is proportional to the difference between the respective sums of the atoms of which the bodies are composed”.

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He then attributes to electricity "the various physical appearances of light, heat, and magnetism", and considers himself even less liable to err in

"attributing to this strictly spiritual principle the more important phænomena of vitality, consciousness, and *Thought*".

In conclusion:

"Discarding now the two equivocal terms, 'gravitation' and 'electricity', let us adopt the more definite expressions, '*attraction*' and '*repulsion*'. The former is the body, the latter the soul: the one is the material; the other the spiritual, principle of the Universe. *No other principles exist.* All phænomena are referable to one, or to the other, or to both combined. So rigorously is this the case—so thoroughly demonstrable is it that attraction and repulsion are the *sole* properties through which we perceive the Universe—in other words, by which Matter is manifested to Mind—that, for all merely argumentative purposes, we are fully justified in assuming that matter *exists* only in attraction and repulsion—that attraction and repulsion *are* matter:—there being no conceivable case in which we may not employ the term 'matter' and the terms 'attraction' and 'repulsion' taken together, as equivalent, and therefore convertible, expressions in Logic."

* * *

"I said, just now," continues Poe,

"that what I have described as the tendency of the diffused atoms to return into their original unity, would be understood as the principle of the Newtonian law of gravity . . ."

Here, the poet abandons his *a priori* for a *posteriori* reasoning.

"Let us now see whether the established facts of the Newtonian Gravitation may not afford us, *a posteriori*, some legitimate inductions.

"What does the Newtonian law declare?—That all bodies attract each other with forces proportional to their quantities of matter and inversely proportional to the squares of their distances . . ."

Poe then proposes a statement of the same law which he considers couched in "more philosophical phraseology:—

"Every atom, of every body, attracts every other atom, both of its own and of every other body, with a force which varies inversely as the squares of the attracting and attracted atom".

Poe next affirms that Newton and his successors had their vision dimmed by a sort of optical error or fault of perspective, being hedged on

every side by the workings of gravitation *here upon earth*, and expounds his own ambitious theories.

"Here let the reader pause with me, for a moment, in contemplation of the miraculous—of the ineffable—of the altogether unimaginable complexity of relation involved in the fact that *each atom attracts every other atom* . . . in a wilderness of atoms so numerous that those which go to the composition of a cannon-ball, exceed, probably, in mere point of number, all the stars which go to the constitution of the Universe.

" . . . If I propose to ascertain the influence of one mote in a sun-beam upon its neighboring mote, I cannot accomplish my purpose without first counting and weighing all the atoms in the Universe and defining the precise positions of all at one particular moment. If I venture to displace, by even the billionth part of an inch, the microscopical speck of dust which lies now upon the point of my finger, what is the character of that act upon which I have adventured? I have done a deed which shakes the Moon in her path, which causes the Sun to be no longer the Sun, and which alters forever the destiny of the multitudinous myriads of stars that roll and glow in the majestic presence of their Creator."

But to return to God, Father of the Universe.

"Does not so evident a brotherhood among the atoms point to a common parentage? Does not a sympathy so omniprevalent, so ineradicable, and so thoroughly irrespective, suggest a common paternity as its source? . . . In a word, not because the atoms were, at some remote epoch of time, even *more than together*—is it not because originally, and therefore normally, they were *One*—that now, in all circumstances—at all points—in all directions—by all modes of approach—in all relations and through all conditions—they struggle *back* to this absolutely, this irrelatively, this unconditionally *one*?"

Whereupon Poe discusses whether all atoms strive to a common centre.

"I reply that *they do* . . . but that the cause of their so doing is quite irrespective of the centre *as such*. They all tend rectilinearly toward a centre, because of the sphereicity with which they have been irradiated into space."

With this, Poe's notion of the universe as a sphere makes its appearance and is further elaborated.

"Each atom, forming one of a generally uniform globe of atoms, finds more atoms in the direction of the centre, of course, than in any other, and in that direction, therefore, is impelled—but is *not* thus impelled

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because the centre is *the point of its origin*. It is not to any *point* that the atoms are allied. It is not any *locality*, either in the concrete or in the abstract, to which I suppose them bound. Nothing like *location* was conceived as their origin. Their source lies in the principle, *Unity*. *This* is their lost parent. This they seek always—immediately—in all directions—wherever it is even partially to be found; thus appeasing, in some measure, the ineradicable tendency, while on the way to its absolute satisfaction in the end.”

The atoms do not thus strive to reach a local centre, but a general centre of irradiation. We shall now see how Newton’s law of gravity, according to Poe, is merely complementary to his own law of irradiation; namely, that the atoms return to God in the same fashion as that in which they first issued from Him.

“Whether we reach the idea of absolute *Unity* as the source of All Things” by the *a priori* or the *a posteriori* method,

“... still, the idea itself, if entertained at all, is entertained in inseparable connection with another idea—that of the condition of the Universe of stars as we *now* perceive it—that is to say, a condition of immeasurable *diffusion* through space. Now a connection between these two ideas—unity and diffusion—cannot be established unless through the entertainment of a third idea—that of *irradiation*. Absolute Unity being taken as a centre, then the existing Universe of stars is the result of *irradiation* from that centre.

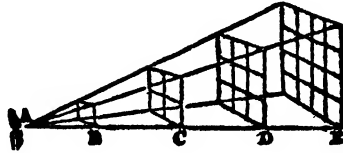
“Now, the laws of irradiation are *known*. They are part and parcel of the *sphere*. They belong to the class of *indisputable geometrical properties* . . .

“But these laws—what do they declare? Irradiation—how—by what steps does it proceed outwardly from a centre?

“From a *luminous* centre, *Light* issues by irradiation; and the quantities of light received upon any given plane, supposed to be shifting its position so as to be now nearer the centre and now farther from it, will be diminished in the same proportion as the squares of the distances of the plane from the luminous body, are increased; and will be increased in the same proportion as these squares are diminished.

“The expression of the law may be thus generalized:—the number of light particles (or, if the phrase be preferred, the number of light-impressions) received upon the shifting plane, will be *inversely* proportional with the squares of the distances of the plane. Generalizing yet again, we may say that the diffusion—the scattering—the irradiation, in a word—is *directly* proportional with the squares of the distances.”

Here follow an explanatory note and diagram, to convey a concrete idea of this law of irradiation.



“In saying, generally, that the irradiation proceeds in direct proportion with the squares of the distances, we use the term irradiation to express the *degree of the diffusion* as we proceed outwardly from the centre. Conversing the idea, and employing the word ‘concentralization’ to express the *degree of the drawing together* as we come back toward the centre from an outward position, we may say that centralization proceeds *inversely* as the squares of the distances. In other words, we have reached the conclusion that, on the hypothesis that matter was originally irradiated from a centre and is now returning to it, the centralization, in the return, proceeds *exactly as we know the force of gravitation to proceed*.”

Such is Poe’s elaborate and ingenuous cosmic phantasy. According to him, Newton’s law would be merely the complement of his own law of emission.

Poe now turns to the stars:

“A very slight inspection of the Heavens assures us that the stars have a certain general uniformity, equability, or equidistance, of distribution through that region of space in which, collectively, and in a roughly globular form, they are situated . . .”

Furthermore—

“the very first glance at the idea, irradiation, forces us to the entertainment of the hitherto unseparated and seemingly inseparable idea of agglomeration about a centre, with dispersion as we recede from it—the idea, in a word, of *inequability* of distribution in respect to the matter irradiated”.

There would thus seem to be a contradiction between our direct observation of the stars and the idea of irradiation. However, the key to the mystery is to be found precisely behind this seeming obscurity. Poe, the infallible ratiocinator, here resorts to Dupin’s reasonings in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. “By the difficulty—the ‘peculiarity’—now presented, I leap at once to *the* secret. . . .”

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Ordinary notions of irradiation derive from a continuous source of light. But God, or Unity, are certainly not thus to be conceived. God, asserts Poe, must have proceeded by means of successive emissions.

“Let me now describe the sole possible mode in which it is conceivable that matter could have been diffused through space, so as to fulfill the conditions at once of irradiation and of generally equable distribution.

“For convenience of illustration, let us imagine, in the first place, a hollow sphere of glass, or of anything else, occupying the space throughout which the universal matter is to be thus equally diffused, by means of irradiation, from the absolute, irrelative, unconditional particle, placed in the centre of the sphere.

“Now, a certain exertion of the diffusive power (presumed to be the Divine Volition)—in other words, a certain *force*—whose measure is the quantity of matter—that is to say, the number of atoms—emitted; emits, by irradiation, this certain number of atoms; forcing them in all directions outwardly from the centre—their proximity to each other diminishing as they proceed—until, finally, they are distributed, loosely, over the interior surface of the sphere.

“When these atoms have attained this position, or while proceeding to attain it, a second and inferior exercise of the same force—or a second and inferior force of the same character—emits, in the same manner—that is to say, by irradiation as before—a second stratum of atoms which proceeds to deposit itself upon the first . . . and so on, until these concentric strata, growing gradually less and less, come down at length to the central point; and the diffusive matter, simultaneously with the diffusive force, is exhausted.”

Thus both irradiation and the *equal* distribution of the atoms are brought to pass. Poe then invites us to examine the universe of atoms so constituted.

“They” (the atoms)

“lie in a series of concentric strata. They are equally diffused throughout the sphere. They have been irradiated into these states.

“The atoms being *equally* distributed . . . the number of atoms lying upon the surface of any one of the concentric spheres, is directly proportional with the extent of that surface.

“*But, in any series of concentric spheres, the surfaces are directly proportional with the squares of the distances from the centre . . .*

“Therefore the number of atoms in any stratum is directly proportional with the square of that stratum’s distance from the centre.

Eureka

"But the number of atoms in any stratum is the measure of the force which emitted that stratum . . .

"Therefore . . . *the force of the irradiation has been directly proportional with the squares of the distances.*"

Here Poe reaches the process of Reaction, and recalls that "Reaction, as far as we know any thing of it, is Action conversed", from whence it follows that "this law of return would be precisely the converse of the law of departure".

Now comes a short dissertation on good and evil with morality and cosmogony strangely mixed. Unity is equated with good and Plurality with evil, which explains why all things strive to return to Unity, and why Gravity is "*the strongest of forces*". He also reiterates *ad nauseam* that the atoms do not seek their centre *as such*, but a state of absolute Unity. After which he refutes three objections: "It may be said, at first . . . that to regard the number of atoms in each stratum" as "the measure of the force with which they are emitted" is an unwarrantable assumption. Which objection Poe answers with: "an effect is the measure of its cause".

"The second supposable objection is somewhat better entitled to an answer. . . How, then, it may be asked, is my first or external stratum of atoms to be understood as discontinuing their movement at the circumference of the imaginary glass sphere, when no second force, of more than an imaginary character, appears, to account for the discontinuance?"

This would, in fact, seem to be contrary to the laws of dynamics. Poe evades this difficulty by claiming that, at the first Divine Act of emission, no such laws as yet existed.

"The primary *act*—that of Irradiation from Unity—must have been independent of all that which the world now calls 'principle'. . . I say '*primary*' act; for the creation of the absolute material particle is more properly to be regarded as a *conception* than as an '*act*' in the ordinary meaning of the term."

These "principles," he adds, derive from "reaction" and therefore it would be advisable . . . to limit the application of the word 'Principle' to the "two *immediate* results of the discontinuance of the Divine Volition—that is, to the two agents, *Attraction* and *Repulsion*".

To the third objection that "the peculiar mode of distribution which I have suggested for the atoms, is 'an hypothesis and nothing more'", he replies, categorically, that the conclusions advanced are imposed on him, "as necessities, in a train of ratiocination *as rigorously logical as that which*

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establishes any demonstration in Euclid" and so are irrefutable. Everything he asserts is based on "*obviousness of relation . . . the principle of the Logical axiom*". The example he gives, concludes thus:

"My *particle proper* is but *absolute Irrelation*. To sum up what has been advanced:—As a starting point I have taken it for granted, simply, that the Beginning had nothing behind it or before it—that it was a Beginning in fact, that it was a beginning and nothing different from a beginning—in short, that this Beginning was—*that which it was*".

Poe refutes, also, those who believe in "an infinite extension of Matter" in limitless Space. For, were this true, atoms could never strive to return to a centre since, were they infinitely dispersed in the Universe, there would be

"exactly as many tendencies to Unity behind the hesitating atom as before it; for it is a mere sotticism to say that one infinite line is longer or shorter than another infinite line. . . Thus the atom in question must remain stationary forever. Under the impossible circumstances which we have been merely endeavoring to conceive for argument's sake, there could have been no aggregation of Matter—no stars—no worlds—nothing but a perpetually atomic and inconsequential Universe."

On the other hand,

"with the understanding of a *sphere* of atoms . . . we perceive, at once, a *satisfiable* tendency to union. The general result of the tendency each to each, being a tendency of all to the centre, the *general* process of condensation or approximation, commences immediately, by a common and simultaneous movement, on withdrawal of the Divine Volition. . . .

"What I wish to impress upon the reader is the certainty of there arising, at once (on withdrawal of the diffusive force, or Divine Volition), out of the condition of the atoms as described, at innumerable points throughout the Universal sphere, innumerable agglomerations, characterized by innumerable specific differences of form, size, essential nature, and distance each from each. The development of Repulsion (Electricity) must have commenced, of course, with the very earliest particular efforts at Unity, and must have proceeded constantly in the ratio of Coalescence—that is to say, *in that of Condensation*, or, again, of Heterogeneity.

"Thus the two Principles Proper, *Attraction* and *Repulsion*—the Material and the Spiritual—accompany each other, in the strictest

fellowship, forever. Thus *The Body and The Soul walk hand in hand.*"

* * *

Thus Poe expounds the basic laws of his cosmogony, after which he reviews Laplace's nebular theory.

He then states that his own ideas coincide, to a certain extent, with that "most magnificent of theories . . . the Nebular Cosmogony of Laplace", but that he cannot accompany him the whole way. We are then asked to consider a complicated theory of the relation between *Repulsion* (electric forces) and *Attraction* (Gravity)—in other words, of the Body and Soul that walk "hand in hand", or the generation, by the sun, of rings that eventually form planets. Though this is not Laplace, it is certainly Poe. Our poet then informs us that

"since condensation can never, in any body, be considered as absolutely at an end, we are warranted in anticipating that, whenever we have an opportunity of testing the matter, we shall find indications of resident luminosity in *all* the stellar bodies—moons and planets as well as suns".

Poe next reduces life itself to a kind of higher manifestation of electricity, the equivalent of his principle of Repulsion, and informs us that

"the importance of the development of the terrestrial vitality proceeds equally with the terrestrial condensation".

He then wonders—basing the supposition on Laplace's theory—whether the successive emergences of new and ever more highly developed species may not be related, in some way, to the sun's successive throwing off of planets, after which the sun re-issues in all its naked, fecundating splendour after shedding its solidified ring.

The then recent discovery that Lord Rosse's new telescope had reduced many apparent nebulae to clusters of stars, which to some people appeared to invalidate Laplace's theory, on the contrary seemed to confirm it to Poe. For, were his own theory of the Divine emission of every atom in the Universe from the original particles correct, then these, God's first creative acts, must have occurred so remotely in time, that no trace of this primal nebular, gaseous substance would be apparent! Laplace, however, believed these primal gaseous nebulae to be real and, also, believed the atomic universe infinite. According to Poe:

"His most unwarranted assumption was that of giving the atoms a movement towards a centre, in the very face of his evident understanding that these atoms, in unlimited succession, extended throughout the Universal space",

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for this, Poe claimed, would petrify motion. Nevertheless, the poet concedes that "in the case of the Nebular Cosmogony", Laplace's "almost miraculous mathematical instinct . . . led him, blindfolded, through a labyrinth of Error, into one of the most luminous and stupendous temples of Truth".

Such is the judgment which Poe, having solved the riddle of the universe, passes on his over-timid predecessor. The astro-physics of our twentieth century has also, in part, rejected Laplace's nebular theory, for the newer view holds that the primary solar system can never have rotated so fast as to throw off the planets and, more important still, that our solar system is too small to prevent the dispersal into space—as Laplace postulated—of the relatively small quantities of matter ejected by the sun. The nebular theory now only seems applicable to nebulae of millions of suns and not to planetary systems.¹

Poe's criticism, however, could not, naturally, be formulated in terms of to-day's mathematics. In the last analysis, his chief quarrel with Laplace—who, referring to God, said he did *not need that hypothesis* to deal with celestial mathematics—is, that he lacked the intuitive vision to see that the Universe was born by God emitting the particle proper.

* * *

Poe now paints a vast fresco of the universe as he conceived it.

"Taking our own solar system, then, as merely a loose or general type of all, we have so far proceeded in our subject as to survey the Universe under the aspect of a spherical space, through which, dispersed with merely general equability, exist a number of but generally similar *systems*.

"Let us now, expanding our conceptions, look upon each of these systems as in itself an atom; which in fact it is, when we consider it as but one of the countless myriads of systems which constitute the Universe. Regarding all, then, as but colossal atoms, each with the same ineradicable tendency to Unity which characterizes the actual

¹ Cf. Sir James JEANS, *The Universe Around Us*, (London, Cambridge University Press. Fourth Ed., 1944), p. 242.

The theory which to-day seems to be replacing the nebular theory as regards the formation of our solar system is the so-called *tidal theory*, a view already held by Buffon, though unsubstantiated by mathematical proof. According to this theory, the planets were born as the result of a star passing too near the sun, so that portions of the solar substance were drawn off as long filaments or arms which then condensed into planets. It follows that the formation of planets would be an accident of rare occurrence. (op. cit., p. 244.)

atoms of which it consists—we enter at once upon a new order of aggregations. The smaller systems, in the vicinity of a larger one, would, inevitably, be drawn into still closer vicinity. A thousand would assemble here; a million there—perhaps here, again, even a billion—leaving, thus, immeasurable vacancies in space. And if, now, it be demanded why, in the case of these systems—of these merely Titanic atoms—I speak, simply, of an ‘assemblage’, and not, as in the case of the actual atoms, of a more or less consolidated agglomeration:—if it be asked, for instance, why I do not carry what I suggest to its legitimate conclusion, and describe, at once, these assemblages of system-atoms as rushing to consolidation in spheres—as each becoming condensed in one magnificent sun—my reply is that μέλλοντα ταῦτα—I am but pausing, for a moment, on the awful threshold of *the Future*. For the present, calling these assemblages ‘clusters’, we see them in the incipient stages of their consolidation. Their *absolute* consolidation is *to come*.

“We have now reached a point from which we behold the Universe as a spherical space, interspersed, *unequally*, with *clusters*. It will be noticed that I here prefer the adverb ‘unequally’ to the phrase ‘with a merely general equability’, employed before. It is evident, in fact, that the equability of distribution will diminish in the ratio of the agglomerative processes—that is to say, as the things distributed diminish in number. Thus the increase of *inequability*—an increase which must continue until, sooner or later, an epoch will arrive at which the largest agglomeration will absorb all the others—should be viewed as, simply, a corroborative indication of the *tendency to One*.”

Thus, for Poe, the present condition of the universe would be of matter returning to this state of Unity. Observations by telescope, he tells us, confirm his view and permit us to understand that “the perceptible Universe exists as a *cluster of clusters, irregularly disposed*”.

Now the poet unrolls the wonders of stellar space; first, our Milky Way, or Galaxy, which he describes as a “lenticular star-island” surrounded by a ring, environed by outer space, this being interspersed with what are wrongly termed *nebulae* for, according to Poe, these are only “perspectively scattered” and “part and parcel of the one . . . Universal Sphere”. Poe then asks us to view the heavens through a powerful telescope, when we shall discover, he says, as was indeed believed at the time, that a band or “*belt of clusters*” (“*nebulae*”) “a *band of varying breadth*”, stretches “from horizon to horizon, at right angles to the general course of the Milky Way. This band is the ultimate *cluster of clusters*”. A little later he writes,

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"No astronomical fallacy is more untenable . . . than that of the absolute *illimitation* of the Universe of Stars. . . . Were the succession of stars endless, then the background of the sky would present us an uniform luminosity, like that displayed by the Galaxy—*since there could be absolutely no point, in all that background, at which would not exist a star.*"

Against this, however, our telescopes discover *voids* "in innumerable directions"; "chasms, blacker than Erebus" which

"seem to afford us glimpses, through the boundary walls of the Universe of Stars, into the illimitable Universe of Vacancy, beyond . . .

"We comprehend, then, the insulation of our Universe. . . . But *because* upon the confines of this Universe of Stars we are compelled to pause, through want of farther evidence from the senses, is it right to conclude that, in fact, there *is* no material point beyond that which we have thus been permitted to attain? Have we, or have we not, an analogical right to the inference that this Universe—that this cluster of clusters—is but one of *a series* of clusters of clusters, the rest of which are invisible through distance. . . . ?"

Here Poe disclaims any share in the common frailty which inclines us to belief in the infinite.

"The human brain has obviously a leaning to the '*Infinite*', and fondles the phantom of the idea . . . nevertheless, there *may* be a class of superior intelligences, to whom the human bias alluded to may wear all the character of monomania."

It is in terms of the infinite, however, that Poe now replies to his question.

"Have we any right to infer—let us say, rather, to imagine—an interminable succession of the 'clusters of clusters', or of 'Universes' more or less similar?

"I reply that the 'right', in a case such as this, depends absolutely upon the hardihood of that imagination which ventures to claim the right. Let me declare, only, that, as an individual, I myself feel impelled to the *fancy*—without daring to call it more—that there *does* exist a *limitless* succession of Universes, more or less similar to that of which we have cognizance—to that of which *alone* we shall ever have cognizance—at the very least until the return of our own particular Universe into Unity. *If* such clusters of clusters exist, however—and *they do*—it is abundantly clear that, having had no part in our origin, they have no portion in our laws. They neither attract us, nor we them. Their material—their spirit is not ours—is not that which obtains in any part of our Universe. They could not impress our senses or our

souls. Among them and us—considering all, for the moment collectively—there are no influences in common. Each exists, apart and independently, *in the bosom of its proper and particular God.*”

A sort of hymn to the grandeur of the Universe follows, or rather to the generative powers of the Creator, from whom were thrown off those heavenly bodies whose mass, volume and distribution in space would defy the tongues of archangels. Kepler’s and Bode’s laws are cited, as also some astronomically huge numbers.

We shall not pause to point out the errors in Poe’s scientific reasoning, but content ourselves with faithfully recording the development of his ideas. We are now asked to admire “the absolute accuracy of the Divine *adaptation*”, the example given being universal adaptation and the divine reversibility of cause and effect, whereby “the human frame, to maintain its animal heat, requires . . . an abundant supply of highly azotized food, such as train-oil”, (sic) while “in polar climates nearly the sole food afforded man is the oil of abundant seals and whales”, this constituting “absolute *reciprocity of adaptation*”. From this and other considerations, we see, says Poe, that “the plots of God”, contrary to man’s, “are perfect”. “The Universe”, also, “is a plot of God”. Thus, it is the often miraculous adjustment of living organisms, doubtless determined by the higher nervous centres and ages of adaptation to environment, which Poe projects on his anthropomorphized Universe and attributes to the universal Father’s omniscient and all-provident wisdom.

Here Poe insists on the need to defend ourselves against our propensity to argue from analogy, as though in protest against an unconscious awareness that this is exactly what he is doing. None, he says, should believe that infinite systems exist which revolve round spheres of ever-largening size such as exist nowadays. That would be falsely arguing by analogy. We must not fall into the errors of a Madler, who postulates a stupendous non-luminous central sun round which the whole galaxy revolves. What actually happens is quite different. Does not the telescope reveal that Herschel’s “circular” nebulae, according to Nichol, are surrounded by

*“volumes of stars, stretching out apparently as if they were rushing towards a great central mass in consequence of the action of some great power?”*¹

¹ Here Poe, following Dr. Nichol, doubtless confuses the visible throwing off of nebular matter with what he calls its “progressive collapse”.

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Thus, the return of Matter to Unity is depicted in actual progress; a process already begun but far from complete. Only in futurity will the whole of matter amalgamate in one colossal globe, precursive of final catastrophe. To explain this ultimate concentration, it is not necessary to invoke the theory of the retardation of celestial movements by action of the ether. God alone will suffice. It would be impiety to think that the universe will be brought to an end

“less simply—less directly—less obviously—less artistically—than through *the reaction of the originating Act*”.

Now Poe, with sweeping strokes, paints in the Universe:

“Recurring, then, to a previous suggestion, let us understand the systems—let us understand each star, with its attendant planets—as but a Titanic atom existing in space with precisely the same inclination for Unity which characterized, in the beginning, the actual atoms after their irradiation throughout the Universal sphere”.

Acted upon by this inclination, the “system-atoms” strive “towards their respective centres of aggregation” and draw together into clusters which, in turn, strive towards a common centre. Such is the “awful Present”.

And now our prophet juggles with the stars and paints the Future:

“Of the still more awful Future a not irrational analogy may guide us in framing an hypothesis. The equilibrium between the centripetal and centrifugal forces of each system, being necessarily destroyed upon attainment of a certain proximity to the nucleus of the cluster to which it belongs, there must occur, at once, a chaotic or seemingly chaotic precipitation, of the moons upon the planets, of the planets upon the suns, and of the suns upon the nuclei; and the general result of this precipitation must be the gathering of the myriad now-existing stars of the firmament into an almost infinitely less number of almost infinitely superior spheres. . . . Then, indeed, amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns. But all this will be merely a climactic magnificence foreboding the great End. . . . While undergoing consolidation, the clusters themselves, with a speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing towards their own general centre—and now, with a thousand-fold electric velocity, commensurate only with their material grandeur and with the spiritual passion of their appetite for oneness, the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe is at hand.

“But this catastrophe—what is it? We have seen accomplished the in-gathering of the orbs. Henceforward, are we not to understand *one material globe of globes* as constituting and comprehending the Universe?

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Such a fancy would be altogether at war with every assumption and consideration of this Discourse.”

For, as we shall see, this globe of globes could never be, as Poe imagines, he proves by this specious reasoning:

“... we have been regarding the electrical influence as a something by dint of whose repulsion alone Matter is enabled to exist in that state of diffusion demanded for the fulfilment of its purposes. . . .”

Given the divine principle of reciprocity of adaptation,

“with a perfectly legitimate reciprocity, we are now permitted to look at Matter, as created *solely for the sake of this influence*—solely to serve the objects of this spiritual Ether. Through the aid—by the means—through the agency of matter, and by dint of its heterogeneity—is this Ether manifested—is *Spirit individualized*” . . .

and so results in the attainment of Conscious Intelligence.

Now, “every work of Divine conception must co-exist and co-expire with its particular design”. Matter, having created Life and Thought, must die with them.

“... I make no doubt that, on perceiving the final globe of globes to be *objectless*, the majority of my readers will be satisfied with my *‘therefore* it cannot continue to exist.’

“When”, however,

“on fulfilment of its purposes . . . Matter shall have returned into its original condition of *One*—a condition which presupposes the expulsion of the separative ether . . .—when, I say, Matter, finally, expelling the Ether, shall have returned into absolute Unity,—it will then (to speak paradoxically for the moment) be Matter without Attraction and without Repulsion—in other words, Matter without Matter—in other words, again, *Matter no more*. In sinking into Unity, it will sink at once into that Nothingness which, to all Finite Perception, Unity must be—into that Material Nihility from which alone we can conceive it to have been evoked—to have been *created* by the Volition of God.

“I repeat then—Let us endeavor to comprehend that the final globe of globes will instantaneously disappear, and that God will remain all in all.

“But are we here to pause? Not so. On the Universal agglomeration and dissolution, we can readily conceive that a new and perhaps totally different series of conditions may ensue—another creation and irradiation, returning into itself—another action and reaction of the Divine

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Will. Guiding our imaginations by that omniprevalent law of laws, the law of periodicity, are we not, indeed, more than justified in entertaining a belief—let us say, rather, in indulging a hope—that the processes we have here ventured to contemplate will be renewed forever, and forever; a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine?

“And now—this Heart Divine—what is it?” asks Poe, whose inspired fervour here rises to new heights. “*It is our own.*—Let not the merely seeming irreverence of this idea frighten our souls” from the sublime introspection through which we may attain a vision of this truth. For, indeed,

“we walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever present *Memories* of a Destiny more vast—very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful.

“We live out a Youth peculiarly haunted by such dreams; yet never mistaking them for dreams. As *Memories* we know them . . .

“So long as this Youth endures, the feeling *that we exist* is the most natural of all feelings. . . . That there was a period at which we did *not* exist—or, that it might so have happened that we never had existed at all—are the considerations, indeed, which *during this youth*, we find difficulty in understanding. Why we should *not* exist, is, *up to the epoch of our Manhood*, of all queries the most unanswerable. Existence—self-existence—existence from all Time and to all Eternity—seems, up to the epoch of Manhood, a normal and unquestionable condition—*seems, because it is.*

“But now comes the period at which a conventional World-Reason awakens us from the truth of our dream. Doubt, Surprise and Incomprehensibility arrive at the same moment. They say:—‘You live and the time was when you lived not. You have been created. An Intelligence exists greater than your own; and it is only through this Intelligence that you live at all . . .

“No thinking being lives who, at some luminous point of his life of thought, has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile efforts at understanding, or believing, that anything exists *greater than his own soul. . . .*”

This is well observed, except that feelings of megalomania hardly coincide with the most luminous point of our mental life. But self-criticism is hardly Poe’s strongest point in the narcissistic and paranoiac paroxysm of mysticism on which *Eureka* ends.

“The utter impossibility of any one’s soul feeling itself inferior to another; the intense, overwhelming dissatisfaction and rebellion at the

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thought:—these, with the omniprevalent aspirations at perfection, are but the spiritual, coincident with the material, struggles towards the original Unity.”

For “each soul is, in part, its own God—its own Creator: . . . God—the material *and* spiritual God—*now* exists solely in the diffused Matter and Spirit of the Universe”. Again, “the regathering of this diffused Matter and Spirit will be but the re-constitution of the *purely* Spiritual and Individual God”. This, therefore, is tantamount to saying that the rôles will at last be exchanged and that the Creator, by a just reversal of the state which exists in the beyond—or here below!—will be re-engendered by his creatures. But we are not, for all that, to believe that this condensation, from which God will be reborn, is to absorb our individual personalities without some adequate reward. For, in a final note to *Eureka*, Poe assures us that

“The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity ceases at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is, neither more nor less than the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God.”¹

Thus the final conclusion of this cosmological phantasy, *Eureka*, is that Poe is the equal of God.

The *Memories* alluded to earlier, now appear and deliver a pompous and closing effusion:

“There was an epoch in the Night of Time, when a still-existent Being existed—one of an absolutely infinite number of similar Beings that people the absolutely infinite domains of the absolutely infinite space. It was not and is not in the power of this Being—any more than it is in your own—to extend, by actual increase, the joy of his Existence; but . . . this Divine Being . . . passes his Eternity in perpetual variation of Concentrated Self and almost Infinite Self-Diffusion. What you call The Universe is but his present expansive existence. . . . All these creatures” (in the Universe) “—*all*—those which you term animate, as well as those to whom you deny life for no better reason than that you do not behold it in operation—*all* these creatures have, in a greater or less degree, a capacity for pleasure and for pain:—*but the general sum of their sensations is precisely that amount of Happiness which appertains by right to the Divine Being when concentrated within Himself.* These creatures are all, too, more or less conscious Intelli-

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 16, p. 336.

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gences; conscious, first, of a proper identity; conscious . . . by faint indeterminate glimpses, of an identity with the Divine Being of whom we speak—of an identity with God. Of the two classes of consciousness, fancy that the former will grow weaker, the latter stronger, during the long succession of ages which must elapse before these myriads of individual Intelligences become blended . . . into One. Think . . . that Man, for example, ceasing imperceptibly to feel himself Man, will at length attain that awfully triumphant epoch when he shall recognize his existence as that of Jehovah. In the mean time bear in mind that all is Life—Life—Life within Life—the less within the greater, and all within the Spirit Divine.”

On which pantheistic hymn the poem ends.

* * *

Certain modern writers have expressed great admiration for this work of Poe's, not only as a poem but, as anticipating, with the insight of genius, modern theories of physics. Did not Poe, for example, as Paul Valéry asserts, adumbrate Carnot's law of the transformation of energy?¹ Indeed, we may admit—here joining the praise—that, at a time when the supreme law of physics was, “Nothing is lost in the universe, nothing created”, Poe was indeed courageous to advance the following proposition:

“So thoroughly demonstrable is it that attraction and repulsion are the *sole* properties through which we perceive the Universe—in other words, by which Matter is manifested to Mind—that . . . we are fully justified in assuming that matter *exists* only as attraction and repulsion—that attraction and repulsion *are* matter—there being no conceivable case in which we may not employ the term ‘matter’ and the terms ‘attraction’ and ‘repulsion’, taken together, as equivalent, and therefore convertible expressions in Logic”.

Reading this, ones mind turns at once to the modern electro-magnetic theory of matter. Again, when Poe writes that each separate sidereal system must be conceived as a

¹ “Il y a dans *Eureka* un pressentiment du principe de Carnot et de la représentation de ce principe par le mécanisme de la diffusion.” (“In *Eureka* we find a premonition of Carnot's law and the illustration of that law *via* the mechanics of diffusion . . .”), Paul Valéry, *Variété*, Paris, Gallimard, 1928; essay entitled *Au sujet d'Eureka*, p. 126. Carnot's *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu et sur les machines propres à développer cette puissance* was published in 1824, but at the time *Eureka* was written, 1848, Carnot's ideas were still far from being generally familiar.

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“Titanic atom existing in space with precisely the same inclination for Unity which characterized, in the beginning, the actual atoms after their Irradiation throughout the Universal sphere”,

we might almost think his genius glimpsed what would be our current attitude: the structural analogy between the atom and the sidereal system, whose orbits follow the same laws, whether the bodies or particles revolving round their nuclei be huge planets or infinitely small electrons. Similarly, when Poe states that

“whenever we have an opportunity of testing the matter we shall find indications of resident luminosity in *all* the stellar bodies—moons and planets as well as suns”,

the superficial would say he had here divined radioactivity, while the better informed would see intimations of the discovery that matter, so long as it has not reached absolute zero, will go on emitting various rays. Again, Poe’s exceedingly narcissistic and megalomaniac phantasy of “shaking the Moon in her path”, causing the “Sun to be no longer the Sun” and “altering forever the destiny of the multitudinous myriads of stars that roll and glow in the majestic presence of their Creator” by displacing, “by even the billionth part of an inch, the microscopical speck of dust” on the tip of his finger—which reminds us, in humbler form, of the phantasy of *The Power of Words*,¹ (creative of stars)—has its parallel in modern astrophysics; for does not Sir James Jeans write that “each time the child throws its toy out of its baby carriage, it disturbs the motion of every star in the universe?”.²

But let us pause in our search for analogies of this kind and sound a note of prudence,³ for a cloud may be like a castle or mountain, but none the less is a cloud.

¹ *The Power of Words: Democratic Review*, June, 1845; *Broadway Journal*, II, 16.

² Sir James Jeans, *The Universe Around Us*. p. 215, op. cit., page 610, note.

³ M. Edmond Bauer, Professor of Physics at the Collège de France, kindly read through my chapter on *Eureka* with me and commented as follows in a subsequent letter:

“Here is all I am able to add to clear up and complete our talk:

“I must begin with two general remarks, however:

I. From the scientific angle, *Eureka* contains certain statements, certain theoretical viewpoints which still seem correct or plausible; but there are also a considerable number of errors and much that is childish or hazy. Among the ideas still accepted, however, I see none that could be fathered on Poe.

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Actually, the human mind, ever since it first existed and conceived systems of metaphysics, or physics, has always obeyed the same laws and projected the same complexes on the universe outside itself. In metaphysics, these hypotheses remain unproved: but in physics proof is required, though both originate from the same source; the human psyche. Thus, though the Universe, at times, condescends to smile on our suppositions by according them with reality, scientific hypotheses, none the less—at least in their forms of expression—often strangely resemble metaphysical reveries. Whence, their family resemblance—a resemblance real enough, for are not both born of the human mind—and the fact that works like *Eureka*, to

His work is a poem, moving and often very fine, but it is also a metaphysical effort, expressed in very vague terms. Looked at as a piece of scientific philosophy, it must be regarded as confused ramblings about ideas that were public property at the time.

- II. A remarkable fact is that Poe seems to have been unaware of one of the essential properties of matter; and one by which, in mechanics, it is defined—namely, its *inertia*. Thus, he completely ignores the laws of motion and, even, I would say, shows an extraordinary lack of dynamic instinct, so that all conception of the active forces, impulses and moving masses already familiar to Leonardo da Vinci, Descartes and Leibnitz, appears missing. Whence, eventually arises the failure to distinguish between the diffusion of matter, *i.e.*, motion, and irradiation, *i.e.*, the propagation of light, or radiation.

“Now for more detailed comment:

“Pages 600–602 and 618–9: For Poe, matter is attraction and repulsion. Repulsive forces are necessary to explain its impenetrability.

“These are ideas current since the 18th century and explicitly expressed by the atomist, Boscovich; his atoms were nuclei of attractive and repulsive forces, attracting at great distances and repelling at close range.

“Pages 601–602 and 624–5: Repulsion=electricity. A gross error, for electricity develops forces that both attract and repel.

“Yet there is an interesting idea here; that natural forces can only originate in two ways: by electricity and by gravitation. This is the modern view.

“Pages 601–2 and 624–5: The italicised law is meaningless. Poe’s reasoning here is quite incomprehensible to me. One feels he is referring to Volta’s law; but in what terms!

“Pages 602–3: Poe’s ‘philosophical phraseology’ (italicised) is in no way original and was common to all atomists after Newton.

“Last par. page 603 and first par. page 604: Makes no sense in physics.

“Pages 604–605: Newton’s law as a reaction to the law of radiation (of photometry). One should add: clever but ingenuous and *purely verbal* cosmic phantasy invented by Poe.

“There is no reason why two laws of inverse ratios to the squares of distances should be linked, whether by action upon or reaction to each other. We know

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the superficial or uninstructed, may seem far in advance of their time!
Even so, *Eureka* remains a castle in the air.

* * *

Poe, thus, in *Eureka*, appears less as precursor than follower; the follower of the many prophets and visionaries who, since man—the religious animal—was man, have engendered cosmogonies.

Poe's Trinity of Radiation, Attraction and Repulsion, in some ways resembles the Hindu Trinity or Trimurti, where Brahma represents the creative, Siva the destructive and Vishnu the preserving principles.

to-day that these laws are of widely different origin (not to mention electromagnetic laws, certain of which have similar forms).

"Pages 608 and 611-612: Objections to matter as of infinite extension (dynamic objection and optical objection). These originated with the astronomer Olbers, and date from the late 18th century. Classic in Poe's time.

"They no longer seem wholly conclusive to-day. Nevertheless, they have played a part in Einstein's and de Sitter's work on the 'finite universe'.

"Page 609: The 'nebular theory of Laplace' is a standard phrase. The passage about 'indications of luminosity' is very obscure and I doubt whether any meaning can be attached to it.

"The development of the terrestrial vitality proceeds equally with the terrestrial condensation'. This is certainly false. Life is possible only within a very small temperature range; a little more or less heat and death would prevail. Life may be only a rare exception.

"Pages 609-610: The hypothesis of an original nebula has not been wholly abandoned. It is still admitted in regard to the whole Universe, or the Galactic System. (Cf. JEANS, *The Stars in Their Courses*, Chapter VII, pp. 131-4.)

"It is only the theory of the ejection of the planets by centrifugal force which seems less plausible.

"Pages 610-612: The division of the universe into groups is still admitted as a hypothesis (Cf. JEANS, op. cit., Chapter VIII, pp. 135-6, ff (star-systems). It appears to have been stated earlier by Kant.

"Pages 611-612: The part played by the nebulae has come to assume much more importance since Poe's day. A far greater number are known, and we know better how they are distributed in space. But the modern view-point still remains undecided, the observed facts being difficult to reconcile with each other.

"Pages 614-618: All this passage on the successive deaths and resurrections of the universe is very fine. It is like a prevision of modern theories on the degradation and reorganisation of energy. Where Poe places the intervention of God, Boltzmann and Clerk Maxwell would substitute *chance*.

"Unfortunately, all this was said by Kant in his *Theorie des Himmels* (1775, I think).

"Carnot's principle was popularised among engineers by Clapeyron (1834), though mainly developed by Lord Kelvin (1848) and Clausius (1850). I find in Poe only the vaguest notions of the degradation of energy."

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“Brahma remained the creator, though threatened by Siva, the destroyer. Through Siva leaves wither, age succeeds youth, rivers merge into the ocean and the dying year ends. Were this Death God not checked the universe would soon be annihilated. But a reparative force, the saviour Vishnu, works to preserve the world . . .”¹

In other words, Poe's principle of Repulsion, which counteracts the disastrous possibility of instantaneous Return, *i.e.*, Poe's Attraction or, put otherwise, Siva.

One might similarly seek, and find, analogies to Poe's concepts, in the *emanation* and *gradation* of Plotinus, according to whom the universe issued from God in a series of similarly lessening emanations (Plotinus also, doubtless, anticipated Carnot's principle), and will reintegrate with God, once more, by similar successive steps. Unlike Poe, however, Plotinus stresses spirit rather than matter.

Similar analogies might be found between Poe's cosmogony and many other philosophic or religious systems. But those we have cited will suffice to show that the human mind, wherever and whenever it thinks and feels, like other organs of the body, tends to secrete a similar product.

Now, every man-invented cosmogony has had, as its base, the human mind. Considered cursorily, the universe could not have existed, no more than ourselves, time out of mind. Our analogical way of thinking makes us demand a beginning to all things and that they be created by a Father, in the same way that our own drew us from the Void. This exalted Father, whatever his name, according to epoch or latitude, is the Creator, God.

The analogy between the creative act of a metaphysical deity and the generative act of the physical father, at times, seems very accurate. Poe's Particle Proper, the initial organism which he expressly states is indivisible (unicellular), even seems to suggest the spermatozoon.

The return of all things to God, who receives back into himself all his own created beings—this yearning to return to God experienced, in Poe's system as in that of Plotinus, by everything that exists—to us seems a sort of expression, in metaphysical terms, of the son's great yearning for the father to whom he has remained libidinally fixated. Does not Poe say, anent the principle of Unity (God) towards which all atoms tend, “This is their lost parent”? Baudelaire, in his translation of this passage, has rightly interpreted parent as *father*,² for it is the father, who represses and

¹ ALFRED FOUILLÉE: *Histoire de la Philosophie*, Paris, Delagrave, 1926, 17e éd., p. 6.

² “C'est là le père qu'ils ont perdu.”

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and replaces the mother who, in Poe's case as in that of Plotinus and many another mystic, here dominates the picture.

* * *

There still remains for us to study, in closer detail, the development of Poe's latent thought in writing *Eureka* for, when we summarised the manifest content, we took care to avoid interposing an interpretation lest we complicated a picture already obscure. But, as in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, there is a deeper burden in the theme underlying *Eureka*, which we must try to free from Poe's new adventures—in the Universe, this time.

"As our starting point, then, let us adopt the *Godhead*." Here Poe clearly states his position: in the beginning was God the Father and Him alone. The mother, apparently, has been eliminated from this cosmogony. Thus, from the beginning it was an androgynous universe. In Genesis, God at least fecundated Chaos (a mother image) with his breath; here, not even chaos is mentioned. On the one hand there is God, on the other "Nihility". It is into this Void that God casts (emits) what constitutes the initial appearance of Matter—the Particle Proper or, in other words, the divine Spermatozoon. "The willing into being the primordial particle, has completed the act, or more properly, the *conception* of Creation." In this androgynous scheme, it is not necessary for the divine spermatozoon to join with the ovum to engender that Son of God, the Universe. For the particle, "absolutely unique, individual, undivided" is not, for all that, "indivisible", since "he who *created* it, by dint of his Will can, by an infinitely less energetic exercise of the same Will, as a matter of course, divide it". The cellular division which is inaugurated, biologically, by the conjunction of spermatozoon and ovum, that being the prime condition of all organic development, begins now, therefore, to take place.

"The assumption of absolute Unity in the primordial Particle includes that of infinite divisibility. Let us conceive the Particle, then, to be only not totally exhausted by diffusion into Space. From the one Particle, as a centre, let us suppose to be irradiated spherically—in all directions—to immeasurable but still to definite distances in the previously vacant space—a certain inexpressibly great yet limited number of unimaginally yet not indefinitely minute atoms."

Thus, metaphysically transposed, does Poe's imagination (he himself unaware of what he is, in fact, phantasying) conceive the processes of cellular division which have created his anthropomorphized organism, the Universe, in our human image.

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But cellular division, proceeding from an initial cell, has nevertheless engendered many various organs in our bodies, which latent observation of Poe's dictates the following confused dissertation on the plurality and heterogeneous multiplicity of the atoms.

"Unity being their source, and *difference from Unity* the character of the design manifested in their diffusion, we are warranted in supposing this character to be at least *generally* preserved throughout the design and to form a portion of the design itself."

The confusion and obscurity of the succeeding passage may well reflect Poe's own confused ideas on embryology where clearly he was quite at sea, for he makes the atoms, through all their diverging multiplicity, retain their yearning after Unity (Union or Reunion with God) and that, from the instant of their emission; an observation tantamount to saying that the son, from the moment of his origin or conception is, and forever remains, libidinally attached to the father, with whom he craves to be restored to his original one-ness. This, indeed, must have been Poe's mental attitude when, in the months after Virginia's death, he sought to detach himself from woman during his interminable walks along the aqueduct at Fordham, under the stars.

Thus Newtonian gravity which, Poe claimed, expressed this tendency to return to God, as a result is erotised and equated with the mystic's love of God, *i.e.*, with that of the son for the father. Here, however, we must remember that all the child's relations to its father are but displacements from its primary relations to its mother.¹ Now Poe's relation to his mother was, as we know, all said and done, that of a little mourning orphan to a corpse. Thus, to Poe, the return of the mother signified, more realistically and more autobiographically than to any of us, reunion with the loved object in death—death being already commonly linked in the unconscious with the prenatal, foetal state. In *Eureka*, these death-attributes of the mother have evidently been transferred to the Father, God, and the restoration to Him of the Universe is exactly equated, for Poe, with both union in love and union in death.

That is why Poe opposes the force of Attraction, equated in *Eureka* with the death-instinct, with the force of Repulsion, equated there with the life instinct. And how, in effect, does Poe define that force?

¹ I am indebted to a verbal communication made me by Freud for my knowledge of this important principle. This was later published in his work on sexuality in woman: *Über die weibliche Sexualität*, 1931, *Ges. Werke*, Band XIV. In English, *Female Sexuality*, *Int. Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XIII, 1932, pp. 281-297.

"... what I have spoken of as a repulsive influence prescribing limits to the (immediate) satisfaction of the tendency" (of the atoms to lose themselves in God or Unity) "will be understood as *that* which we have been in the practice of designating now as heat, now as magnetism, now as *electricity*, displaying our ignorance of its awful character in the vacillation of the phraseology with which we endeavor to circumscribe it."

After which, *ex cathedra* Poe asserts:

"The amount of electricity developed on the approximation of two bodies, is proportional to the difference between the respective sums of the atoms of which the bodies are composed".

And in conclusion, adds:

"To electricity . . . we *may* not be wrong in referring the various physical appearances of light, heat and magnetism; but far less shall we be liable to err in attributing to this strictly spiritual principle the more important phenomena of vitality, consciousness and thought".

We quote these passages again as specially significant. Indeed, strange as at first sight it appears, to our mind Poe's principle of Repulsion corresponds, to all intents, with what we call libido.

Is not libido terrible and strange? Is it not light, heat, magnetism and electricity? And do we not know what is generally symbolised by electricity, magnetism and those "effluvia" whose real significance the paranoiac so well indicates when he maintains that his persecutors employ them to bombard and torment him?¹ These influences correspond to real sex excitations in the subject and if, as some physiologists think, nervous charges are more or less electrical, paranoiacs, in their way, may not be altogether wrong.

But if, for Poe, two bodies in contact generate electricity—as we are justified in imagining, even from the libidinal aspect—such electricity should not be permitted to extinguish itself in a flash! For, says Poe, only on that condition can the stored-up electricity be converted into vitality, consciousness and thought. May we not, here, in this obscure passage, see an echo of the pattern of Poe's own sex life? Electricity, to Poe, was to remain a "strictly spiritual principle", in other words, love—but platonic. This, then, would be the means of preserving ones "electricity" (which could then be sublimated into thought and artistic creation) and, above all, of preserving ones *life*. For, to Poe's unconscious, union with the loved

¹ Cf. the "God's rays" in the case of Schreber, op. cit. page 555, note.

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object would not only have been equated with a necrophilist act but, also, with becoming a corpse oneself (*thanatophilia*). In Poe, there was not only erotisation of death but what might be termed thanatisation of the libido. The sex act, in his unconscious at least, was equated with the risk of dying for, in every woman he met, he rediscovered the dead mother, that first and lost love-object whom he forever yearned to rejoin. And since the sex-act might prove so exceedingly dangerous, implying, as we saw castration and now, as we see, death, his immense narcissism rebelled against these two dangers and raised against the primary, but dangerous "Attraction", his principle of "Repulsion" which implied avoidance of women and all love-objects; for that alone could preserve for him, not only his penis and "electricity" but even, it might be, his life.

The Universe of *Eureka* behaves in similar wise. Attraction recalls it yearningly to its first love-object, the Being from whom it issued; here, the Father in place of the Mother. But, since this reunion would imply—in one supreme ecstatic flare-up—the extinction of self and the immediate death of the Universe in the bosom of Him to whom it owed birth, the Universe must bow to the fiat of Repulsion and so, for a time, (its allotted span of existence), preserve both its electricity and life.

Later, putting aside the concept of Repulsion Poe, in a manner almost obsessional, seeks to reduce to mathematical formulæ both God's fatherhood, and the yearning to return to Him, which animates the Universe his child. He therefore attempts to prove, and succeeds to his own satisfaction, that Newton's law of gravity is but the "reciprocal of the law of emission", a primordial principle which only the intuitive genius of a Poe, surpassing that of Laplace or Newton, could have discovered! Which may be interpreted as saying that the Son must strive to return to the Father with a libidinal ardour equal to that of the Father when he engendered the son.

In stating his case thus, the poet compares space to

"a hollow sphere of glass, or of anything else, occupying the space throughout which the universal matter is to be thus equally diffused, by means of irradiation, from the absolute, irrelative, unconditional particle, placed in the centre of the sphere".

We thus have a kind of womb within which the Universe is seen as developing—the womb of a mother or father—but the latter, again, by transference of maternal attributes. The whole discussion here is extraordinarily geometric and schematic, in keeping with the mathematising bent exemplified in this part of *Eureka* in which Poe, moreover, claims

supra-natural dynamic activities for the atomic motions initiated by the Creator when creation took place. God is represented as filling the matrix, or "hollow sphere" with atoms, by successive emanations of diminishing power which deposit, in the interior, ever smaller concentric layers. There is no difficulty in imagining the stabilising of these emissions except for the first, which there would be nothing to stop, given that then there was nothing but the void. Yet our poet lightly skates round this difficulty by postulating that, at the time of the Deity's first emission—or ejaculation—no principles existed. "The primary *act*", he declares,

"that of Irradiation from Unity—must have been independent of all that which the world now calls 'principle' . . . : I say '*primary*' act; for the creation of the absolute material particle is more properly to be regarded as a *conception* than as an '*act*' in the ordinary meaning of the term".

Perhaps the poet, in this strange, roundabout way, confesses himself defeated by the unfathomed mystery of the origins of life, for which none of the physical principles so far discovered in nature successfully account.

Again, when Poe, immediately after, inveighs against those who believe in an "infinite extension of Matter" in infinite space, and seeks to prove this impossible for, under such conditions, there could be no attractive tendency towards Return, we should perhaps see this as the manifest expression of the deep latent thought that the being conceived in the maternal or, paternal, womb could never, either when enclosed or afterwards, grow beyond certain limits—a biological truism, indeed! The concept of a finite stellar universe to which Poe so fiercely clings and which, at times, he defends with such exasperation and fury, must have stemmed from this profoundly unconscious and anthropomorphic concept of the Universe which, unwittingly, he had equated with the *son*, therefore himself, Edgar.

The tendency to return or attraction, as Poe reminds us, must have begun with the first emission, *i.e.*, with the first cellular fission of that organism, the *Universe*. It is in this light that Poe conceives the son's basic, primary yearning for his conceiver. It must not be forgotten, however, that this yearning, to Poe, implied the equal yearning for Death. Thus

"the development of Repulsion (electricity) must have commenced, of course, with the very earliest particular efforts at Unity, and must have proceeded constantly in the ratio of Coalescence—that is to say, *in that of Condensation*, or, again, of *Heterogeneity*".

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For, naturally, the Son-Universe must continue to live to fulfil his destiny, to which end, as is certainly true in Nature, the life instincts (Repulsion, Electricity, etc.) must, for a time at least, outweigh those of death (Attraction, tendency to Return *in utero*, Unity). Attraction and Repulsion moreover, for Poe, are the sole principles of the Universe, while the primal generative act and the Irradiation which continues it remain outside all principles—lost in the mystery of the origins of life. Poe now ends with the statement that

“the two Principles Proper, *Attraction* and *Repulsion*—the Material and the Spiritual—accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship, forever. Thus *The Body* and *The Soul* walk hand in hand.”

Here, too, we may see a way of saying (for in the unconscious two different ideas may well be expressed by one symbol) that, as the child grows, its nervous potential or libido develops parallel with its body.

* * *

When Poe expounds Laplace's theory, no similar opportunity occurs for his unconscious complexes to pierce through, since the conscious rational effort involved in making his resumé takes up most of the foreground of his exposition. Occasionally, however, a breach occurs and we see below the surface, as when the poet foretells that “we shall find indications of resident luminosity in *all* the stellar bodies—moons and planets as well as suns”. To me, it seems that far from being an inspired anticipation of radioactivity or, better, of the “death” of matter when at absolute zero, this proposition, which only fortuitously corresponds to certain objective physical phenomena, much more expresses something highly personal and subjective which Poe's biography explains. The universal luminosity of Matter which Poe postulates in *Eureka* apparently represents one of those rare break-throughs which directly point to the Mother in this otherwise androgynous Universe of his. In *The Fall of the House of Usher*, we saw the pond, spectrally alive and exhaling a putrid phosphorescence, like marshes of decaying vegetable matter over which dance will o' the wisps. Matter, in *Eureka* or, by definition condensation, as we shall later see, never, in fact, wholly materialises; *i.e.*, total death and utter annihilation are not reached, for matter continues luminous throughout the decomposition of the universal body. Now, this body is evidently identical with that which Poe symbolised once before by the moon in *Hans Pfaall* which, there, stood for the dead and decayed form of the sylph-like actress, Elizabeth Arnold.

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The fact that the Universe of *Eureka*, in general, stands for the Son, in no way hinders the Matter which constitutes it symbolising, at times, the Mother to the unconscious. Such contradictions do not trouble the unconscious, which knows nothing of conscious logic.

* * *

Laplace's system expounded and done with, it having no room for a Father (or God) and, additional heresy, permitting the universe to be infinite, Poe reaches out to a universe of clustered solar systems which, in their turn, compose the cluster of clusters or galaxies that form the Universe. Yet, assert again as he may that "no astronomical fallacy is more untenable, and none has been more tenaciously adhered to, than that of the absolute *illimitation* of the Universe of Stars . . ." two pages on we find his common sense reasserting itself against such anthropomorphism, and he asks:

"But *because* upon the confines of this Universe of Stars we are compelled to pause, through want of farther evidence from the senses, is it right to conclude that, in fact, there *is* no material fact beyond that which we have thus been permitted to attain?"

He, thereupon, concludes that such facts exist and that, scattered through infinite space, there must be a no less infinite succession of Universes.

"If such clusters of clusters exist, however—and *they do*—it is abundantly clear that, having had no part in our origin, they have no portion in our laws. They neither attract us, nor we them. . . . Each exists, apart and independently, *in the bosom of its proper and particular God.*"

What interpretation shall we place upon this new, extended, cosmic phantasy? For now he has conjured up numerous Universes, each with its God, infinite in number in infinite space. The infinite, excluded from Poe's first and universal system, has here returned in triumph for, as we shall see, it is merely a question of words whether the endless complex of universes shall be called the Universe, or that word designate each group of clusters.

Leaving aside the unverifiable nature of this hypothesis, doubtless we have here a cosmic translation of the human fact that every son has one father alone, from whom he directly and biologically stems. Poe admits, at need, that other universes, too, occur in infinite space; *i.e.*, that other sons exist. But these he relegates beyond the sidereal wastes and makes remote; as was his brother Henry at Baltimore, and his sister Rosalie at

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the Mackenzies, while he himself grew up with the Allans. In this ambitious cosmic phantasy we may well see elements of brother jealousy projected on infinite space. Yet, evidently, there is more than this; for here, every universe, *i.e.*, every son, only knows one father, one God, who must ever be a stranger to all other sons, or universes. Thus, only to Poe, here identified with our Universe, can sole right in the father belong; that God who rules our own stellar fatherland. Perhaps, in this dream of a sole, unique father, we should see a reactive wish-phantasy to an ancient wound; for had not the little Edgar to transfer his infant libido three times to successive fathers; from David Poe to Elizabeth Arnold's probable lover and then to John Allan, dire and supreme father-God?¹

Poe now, as in a final Apocalypse, shows us his Universe rushing down the path of Return. God alone will suffice to bring about this final concentrating. It would be impious to suppose that the end of all things could be brought about "less simply—less directly—less obviously—less artistically—than through *the reaction of the originating Act*". In other words, than through yearning for the father whose issue we are.

But, though this concentrating has barely begun in the universe we see, a luminous and prophetic glance may be cast at the Future, the terrible Future! The day will dawn when a "chaotic precipitation" will occur

"of the moons upon the planets, of the planets upon the suns, and of the suns upon the nuclei. . . . Then . . . amid unfathomable abysses, will be glaring unimaginable suns. But all this will be merely a climactic magnificence foreboding the great End. . . . While undergoing consolidation, the clusters themselves, with a speed prodigiously accumulative, have been rushing towards their own general centre—and now, with a thousand-fold electric velocity, commensurate only with their material grandeur and with their spiritual passion for oneness, the majestic remnants of the tribe of Stars flash, at length, into a common embrace. The inevitable catastrophe is at hand. But this catastrophe—what is it?"

The prophet answers: the last great *globe of globes* will vanish as soon as formed. For Matter, the attractive force, has existed solely to sustain Electricity, the repulsive force. Since Repulsion has ceased to function and no longer needs Matter to subserve it, Matter becomes useless and must inevitably disappear. Nothing is then left in the immense void but

¹ The fact that other minds have evolved analogous theories (Swedenborg's island-universes, etc.) in no way invalidates our biographical interpretations suggested by Poe's phantasy, *Eureka*. We all know how universal are human complexes; we each, as Molière says, take our good where we find it.

the reunion of Father and Son, brought about by the apocalyptic orgasm represented by this vast general conflagration of worlds and suns. For, clearly, "God will remain all in all", and into him the son will have melted in utter and ecstatic abandon.

One might ask whether this vision of a final annihilation of Matter, which in certain ways seems a forecast of one of the concepts of modern physics and, therefore, may appear possessed of high objective value to some, was not also inspired in Poe by deeply personal and subjective complexes? As we have repeatedly shown, Poe lost his mother as a child, but himself went on living. And the Matter which thus, here, totally disappears or dies after æons of luminosity—a luminosity, Poe tells us, as of the phosphorescence of decay, whose only function is to serve as vehicle for the living Electricity (which represents also Thought and "Spirit individualised")—this dead matter vanishes when Electricity, itself, at last is annihilated. May we not see here a Poesque phantasy of reunion with the lost Mother in death; the mother originally lost, but never conceived as utterly vanished so long as the son remains upon earth; so long as the son, who represents Spirit, Genius, Thought incarnate, has not melted, at last, into her arms? This phantasy of the Son's reunion with the Mother in death would thus be the humble counterpart of the much more striking and impressive phantasy of the Son's final return to his Father's bosom.

"But are we here to pause? Not so." For God does not pause. Having once reabsorbed this universe into his being, he will soon emit another. The Son is to be endlessly rebegotten throughout eternity. In vain did Poe, at first, seek to set spatial and temporal limits to his Universe, as though human life. On every side the infinite creeps back into his system: in space, by the countless universes which strew it and, in time, by the endless succession of God's acts of creation. For the unconscious feels itself immortal and able to be endlessly reborn. Thus, endlessly, there will be "a novel Universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine".

This, in its way, is reminiscent of *The Tell-Tale Heart*. There, we equated the heart of the old man (a father-image)—the heart that throbbed so loudly in the night and drove the son to murderous rage and hate—with the mighty parental phallus. Here, in *Eureka*, that same paternal, phallic Heart again reappears as the throbbing and fecundating Divine Heart. Yet whereas, in *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the son's, the slayer's attitude was positively Œdipal and aggressive, in *Eureka* it is far otherwise for, now, he flings himself lovingly into the father's heart,

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in what might be called an ecstatic and paternal womb-phantasy.

The rivalry between father and son is, nevertheless, apparent. The Son thus returns to the Father but, as we shall see, defeats him at last by himself *becoming* the Father in a supreme act of identification.

"And now", exclaims Poe, "this Heart Divine—what is it? *It is our own*". After which, in ardent introspection, the poet gazes into himself to rediscover the God in himself.

"We walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever-present *Memories* of a Destiny more vast—very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful.

"We live out a youth peculiarly haunted by such dreams; yet never mistaking them for dreams. As *Memories* we *know* them. . . . That there was a period at which we did *not* exist—or, that it might so have happened that we never had existed at all—are the considerations, indeed, which *during this youth*, we find difficulty in understanding. Why we should *not* exist is, *up to the epoch of our Manhood*, of all queries the most unanswerable. Existence—self-existence—existence from all Time and to all Eternity—seems, up to the epoch of Manhood, a normal and unquestionable condition:—*seems, because it is.*"

No better description, indeed, could be found for that sense of immortality inherent in the unconscious, for which time, in absolute terms, does not exist. It is only the ego which, as it develops, acquires the knowledge of time and death.

Now this sense of eternity which dwells deep in the soul and which diverse religions have projected on the beyond in their doctrines of immortality, this sense of another life, after the present, has a real basis in the past, as Poe himself vaguely but justly apprehended. For, before being born to the light, the child does, for a timeless interval, live a hidden womb-life. At the root of all phantasies of previous existence there must lie similar *reminiscences* or rather *phantasies* of *reminiscences*, which doubtless played their part in the great Platonic theory of the recognition of Ideas. The phantasy of a previous existence¹ then easily becomes transposed into that of our survival after death and this is the road Poe's mind has followed.

But now his megalomaniac narcissism bursts forth in revolt, when he makes

"Doubt, Surprise, and Incomprehensibility" say to the grown child:
"You live and the time was when you lived not. You have been

¹ Cf. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du Mal*; "La Vie Antérieure", XII.

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created. An Intelligence exists greater than your own; and it is only through this Intelligence you live at all."

What, Edgar protests, was he started on an intra-uterine existence; was the Father needed to draw him out of Chaos? For here God's Intelligence is clearly a euphemistic symbol for his phallus.

And Poe, in the paranoid attack in which he composed *Eureka*, even goes so far as to deny his generic subordination as regards the Father and God. He is as great as God; he has existed from the beginning; like God, he is eternal. For who could admit, at "some luminous point of his life of thought";—exactly the point which, as he says, he himself has reached!—who could understand or believe "that anything exists *greater than his own soul*"?

It is natural, too, our poet asserts, that we should feel such feelings, for "each soul is, in part, its own God—its own Creator! . . ." for "God—the material *and* spiritual God—*now* exists solely in the diffused Matter and Spirit of the Universe", and "the regathering of this diffused Matter and Spirit will be but the re-constitution of the *purely* Spiritual and Individual God".

Thus the Son, in his turn, begets the Father and, in his megalomaniac narcissism, becomes the Father in his turn. Man—that is to say, Poe—becomes God and, as a supreme identification, there happens to him what happened to God in heaven; he begins to absorb the whole Universe.

"The pain of the consideration that we shall lose our individual identity, ceases at once when we further reflect that the process, as above described, is, neither more nor less than that of the absorption, by each individual intelligence, of all other intelligences (that is, of the Universe) into its own. That God may be all in all, each must become God."¹

At this point, one is irresistibly reminded of the Christian dogma of the consubstantiality of Father and Son. So, out of the dreams of sons in all ages and times, the same phantasies must have arisen—phantasies both of union, as of identification, with the loved, feared Father. For the son is not merely the virile rebel of the Oedipus complex; he is equally attached and submissive to the father through the homosexual forces of love.

The manner in which Poe conceives the return to God in *Eureka* combines these two attitudes. The Universe-Son loses himself in God in a

¹ *Virginia Edition*, Vol. 16, p. 336.

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sort of father womb-phantasy and yet, by the same means, the Œdipal Son, triumphant though annihilated, is regenerated and himself becomes the Father, God. Poe's attitude towards his God is thus far from passive. The father womb-phantasy, met with in certain analyses, moreover, is always the secondary transference from a similar phantasy of the mother. It is the mother, naturally, round whom this phantasy is originally built; the womb-phantasy, as Freud tells us, being the impotent man's substitute for coitus. We have seen, indeed, how frequently such phantasies recur in Poe's works, given his inhibitions. It should not surprise us, therefore, to find a similar phantasy in *Eureka* though there transferred to the father, for this, Poe's last work, is characterised by flight from woman to the saviour-Father.

So later, Wagner, in whose sex-life, doubtless, there were many inhibitions, and whose mighty opus was one long cry to the "saviour" woman, was to end the cycle of his creative work with *Parsifal*. After rejecting Woman or the Mother in the form of Kundry, who brings him his dead mother's kiss, Parsifal, solely absorbed in his love of God, in a kind of father womb-phantasy, triumphantly enters the Graalburg at Montsalvat, symbol of God and Father.

We cannot help loving and, when the Mother is too stringently marked off, man's unquenchable libido turns inevitably to the Father. This attachment to the Father, like all instinctive attractions, may then appear passive as in *The Pit and the Pendulum* or active as in *Eureka* though, nevertheless, still homosexually fixated to its object. What makes possible such reversals in attitude is our inherent primary bisexuality, as biology and psychology ever more clearly demonstrate; a bisexuality reinforced or diminished by our experiences in infancy.

To what extent Poe's constitutional bisexuality determined his permanent avoidance of sex, we do not, of course, know. But the later factor of early experiences must have fallen on propitious ground, so powerfully to influence his development. The classic mechanism by which the small boy, checked by the all-powerful father in the first upsurge of his erotic, Œdipal love for the mother, turns back the currents of his libido upon that same inhibiting father, must have operated with especial strength in the case of the small Edgar. That, his life and work both show.

* * *

In Poe's life, as in his opus, may be seen the three great kinds of conflict which rend the human soul. Firstly, to live, we must yield to the laws of reality, which care nothing for our primitive and stubborn

tendency to seek pleasure. Whence the opposition between the reality principle, dictated by external conditions, and the pleasure-principle, enthroned, from birth to death, deep in our unconscious. The second of the conflicts which make us suffer is one particular instance, as it were, of the original conflict first experienced when reality forces the foetus from the warm shelter of the womb into birth: even then, our first cries rise in revolt! The moral demands of our upbringers that, as we develop, we renounce our erotic and aggressive impulses, again but voice the dictates of reality. But these demands, in society as now constituted, are often such, whether civilising or pathogenic, that their conflict with our often unconquered instincts, even when repressed, places them, necessarily, in a special category. To these two great conflicts, implacable reality opposing our unyielding instincts and social morality opposing those same instincts, we must add a third—that of the male *versus* the female which, biologically, co-exists in each of us. Even when life tips the scale towards one sex or other, the sacrificed sex in each of us protests and asserts itself. Nor does it always and wholly accept the form and function nature imposes on our organs. This bisexual conflict, which ignores the realities of anatomy and physiology, in its turn provides a special case of the general conflict between the pleasure-principle enthroned in the unconscious, and the reality-principle dominant in the outer world, of which our idea of our bodies, in the unconscious, forms part. The greater or less degree of this maladaptation to “erotic reality”,¹ whatever the part played by constitutional factors or infantile experiences, varies with individuals and may be more, or less, pathogenic. Perfect inner harmony, in this respect, which would consist in being wholly man or woman, seems to be something towards which life strives but never wholly reaches, even though, to all practical intents, in many individuals equilibrium seems established.

Now, throughout Poe's life, these three conflicts in him were unusually powerful and destructive. True, his stern moral upbringing with the Allans forced his instincts to renounce the eminently perverse forms of gratification which the gruesome events of his childhood, grafted on an unstable and hereditarily alcoholic constitution, doomed him to seek,

¹ I borrow this term from Ferenczi, *Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality*, in *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis (Sex in Psychoanalysis)*, Richard C. Badger, 1916. Translated from *Entwicklungsstufen des Wirklichkeitssinnes*, *Int. Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, I, 1913, and *Bausteine zur Psychoanalyse*, *Int. Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, 1927, Vol. I. Ferenczi uses the term in describing the search for the love-object. I apply it here, by extension, to the adaptation of the individual to the psycho-physiological realities of his sex.

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but the sex instinct cannot, with impunity, be so drastically repressed; it therefore revenged itself on Poe. It determined his conspicuous maladjustment to reality and threw him back on drugs, which were so many flights from reality, and on the regressive gratifications of an imperfectly developed libido. Only one door, in fact, was left to him to reach full expression; namely, that of creative writing, though this was to be flung wide. It undermined him, psychically, as much as his unfortunate heredity undermined him physically and these two influences, closely twined, acted upon him sometimes as cause and, sometimes, as effect.

The intensity and, nevertheless, the congenital instability of Poe's sex instinct, an instinct which could not defend itself, as in others, from the repressions inculcated by his upbringers, was doubtless rooted in his strong constitutional bisexuality. This it was that caused Poe, in his extreme deference to the fiat of morality, so markedly to avoid the Mother—and Woman—and to end his literary career on that cosmic, homosexual phantasy known as *Eureka*.

* * *

I shall here end this study of Poe's tales. Those I chose were what, to me, seemed most typical, most illustrative of his work, his psychic make-up and his life. Analysts who read this study will themselves recognise, in his other stories, signs of those basic complexes in Poe, which my task was to bring to light.

BOOK IV

Poe and the Human Soul



SIGM. FREUD
1906
(from an etching by F. Schmutzer)

CHAPTER XLV

Literature : Its Function and Elaboration

BEFORE embarking on our analysis of Poe's tales, we wrote: "Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creators' psychology and, as Freud has shown, their construction resembles that of our dreams. The same mechanisms which, in dreams or nightmares, govern the manner in which our strongest, though most carefully concealed desires are elaborated, desires which often are the most repugnant to consciousness, also govern the elaboration of the work of art." Freud, in *The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming*¹ has demonstrated the links which bind the daydreams of adolescents or adults—so nearly related to the dreams of the night—to the play-activities of children; both being fictive fulfilments of wishes. There, too, Freud shows how daydreams and creative writing resemble each other, since the latter gratifies the artist's deepest infantile, archaic and unconscious wishes in imaginary and, more or less, disguised form. Literary works might thus be ranged according to a scale of subjectivity. At one extreme, we should find the writings of a Maupassant or Zola, works written almost impersonally, as it were, in which the author is a spectator merely recording the panorama of existence: such, so to speak, would be works of "viewers" of genius, resembling certain unusual forms of daydreaming, however different, at first sight, they might seem from the average night or daydream. In every case, however, we should have to determine the extent to which the author's personality, split into psychic elements seeking to embody themselves in different characters, permits the author to re-embody himself in each of the characters observed. So, too, in mythological subjects, which would seem a source of external inspiration to the dramatist or poet, and which represent humanity's collective phylogenetic daydreams, an author's ontogenetic complexes will always seek ways of expression in the choice of theme and its elaboration.

¹ *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, pp. 173-183, London, Hogarth Press. Trans. from *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren*, 1908. *Ges. Werke*, Band VII.

It is thus possible, through infinite gradations, to pass from what appear purely objective works to others altogether subjective, which last would seem the original form of creative writing. In this latter the author's complexes, more or less masked, project themselves into the work.

It is works that are wholly subjective, loaded with their creator's unconscious memories or, as we would say, with his complexes, which resemble not only adolescent daydreams but even the night dreams of man. Thus, at one end of our scale we might place the works of a Poe or Hoffman which not only resemble the dream in the fashion they are elaborated, but often reproduce the shape and construction of our nightmares. Moreover, addiction to drugs, doubtless, played its part in the creations of both men.

* * *

The deep infantile sources from which Poe's inspiration was drawn has, we trust, been made clear in the earlier portions of this study. It now remains for us to show, as in Poe's tales, what psychic mechanisms, as such, generally govern the manner in which works of literature are elaborated.

In his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that foundation stone of modern psychology, the only psychology worth the name, that which probes the unconscious, Freud, concluding his chapter on dream-elaboration, wrote:

"It (the Dream-Work) may be exhaustively described if we do not lose sight of the conditions which its product must satisfy. This product, the dream, has above all to be withdrawn from the censorship, and to this end the dreamwork makes use of the *displacement of psychic intensities*, even to the transvaluation of all psychic values; thoughts must be exclusively or predominantly reproduced in the material of visual and acoustic memory-traces, and from this requirement there proceeds the *regard of the dream-work for representability*, which it satisfies by fresh displacements. Greater intensities have (probably) to be produced than are at the disposal of the night dream-thoughts, and this purpose is served by the extensive *condensation* to which the constituents of the dream-thoughts are subjected. Little attention is paid to the logical relations of the thought-material; they ultimately find a veiled representation in the *formal* peculiarities of the dream. The *affects* of the dream-thoughts undergo slighter alterations than their conceptual content. As a rule, they are suppressed; where they are preserved, they are freed from the concepts and combined in accordance with their similarity. Only one part of the dream-work—the revision, variable in amount, which is effected by the partially awakened conscious thought—is at all consistent with the conception which the writers on the

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subject have endeavoured to extend to the whole performance of dream-formation.”¹

Starting from this résumé of the conditions which must be satisfied by the dream-product and which imply the processes which govern its formation, we shall see that these processes, in varying aspects and degrees, are identical with those by which the unconscious content of a literary work, using preconscious thought as a between-stage, is able to pass into the conscious product of the written work. We shall find nothing to surprise us in this fact, since these mechanisms and laws are none other than those which universally govern the human psyche.

* * *

Before, however, we study the diverse processes which govern the elaboration of a literary work, let us seek to formulate a more precise idea of the different psychic states to which we have referred.

What are we to understand, firstly, by unconscious memories, representations or affects which, let there be no mistake, denote happenings which pass totally unperceived or even suspected by consciousness? Our earliest infantile memories always remain in this condition, as do the representations associated with them. They thus form, with the atavistic sum-total of our instincts, the nucleus of what we term the unconscious, from which only their unconscious *affects* succeed in emerging into the preconscious, though displaced on other objects. Thus, it is, that our infantile unconscious continues to govern our lives by imposing its choice of those representations most fitted to effect such displacements.

Preconscious representations may be described as those which, though generally unconscious, may nevertheless emerge into consciousness given suitable occasion. Thus, in effect, we distinguish between two types of unconscious; on one hand the unconscious proper which can never be brought to the surface, composed of the original storehouse of our instincts and earliest infantile experiences and, on the other, the preconscious compounded of later memories and representations which, though generally unconscious may, under favouring conditions, be brought into consciousness.

As for consciousness, its part is very limited, although psychology once included every psychic function in this category. It would appear to be

¹ *The Interpretation of Dreams*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1942. pps. 468-9. Trans. from *Die Traumdeutung*, 1900. *Ges. Werke*, Band II/III.

merely our capacity for apperception but, here, turned inwards to happenings in the psyche. And, just as our capacity for external perception, via the senses, can only perceive phenomena without probing their essence, so our faculty of inner perception can only observe surface movements and gleams of happenings in the inaccessible depths of our unconscious. Thus our conscious ego is never but the more or less watchful spectator of ourselves.

When dreams or literary works are elaborated what generally happens, as indeed with all our psychic products, is that first there has been an external perception. During the day however, our attention, to adapt us to reality, requires to move from object to object. Thus, the beginnings and ends of certain trains of association, during the day, sink into the preconscious. There they continue until their affect is dispersed and vanishes. But, also, they may encounter a link which, by association with some unconscious memory, leads to the unconscious. The entire preconscious chain of associations is then swept into the unconscious and are charged with the incomparable energy inherent in archaic repressed affects which remain resistant to time, because to consciousness. Reinforced by this affect, they then emerge into consciousness as a night or day dream. It is when this "sinking into the unconscious" takes place and before they emerge in new guise, that the preconscious thoughts are subjected to the curious processes, processes very different from those of logical thought, which we shall now consider.

But before we do so, a further remark is necessary. Although language forces us to speak of *sinking* into the unconscious and passing from the unconscious to the preconscious, we must beware of imagining unconscious, preconscious or conscious as localised regions of the psyche, for they are but diverse *conditions* of the latter.

* * *

By sinking into the unconscious, thought-pictures (representations) are, firstly, able to *lose* their affect, which then slips on to more or less allied representations. Examples of such *displacement of psychic intensity* are so numerous, in the tales we have studied, that they constitute, so to speak, the warp and woof of the writer's fabric. To mention only the most striking: in the series of tales of the *Live-in-Death Mother*, for instance, displacement is generally confined to transferring the predominant affect, originally attached to the mother, to the imaginary figures endowed with the attributes which pertained to the dead woman. Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, Madeline, are as morbid, as evanescent as advanced con-

sumptives, while their sylph-like motions seem, already, to exhale an odour of decay. Nevertheless, this simple displacement served to keep Poe ignorant, as for almost a century his readers, that these ailing sylphs were but forms of Elizabeth Arnold. At the most, it was sometimes guessed that Virginia might be a surrogate of Elizabeth.

With *The Fall of the House of Usher*, however, a greater degree of displacement strikes us. There, the "Live-in-Death" Mother is represented not only by Madeline's human form but as a building; a house whose walls, whose atmosphere, breathe putrefaction. To effect this gross displacement, Poe employs one of man's universal symbols; that which represents a woman as a building.

In *Metzengerstein*, the Mother is represented, totemically, by a horse. It is on this that the incestuous libidinal emphasis, which originally belonged to the mother, is displaced. Who ever would have found his way through all this but for the keys, the laws, revealed by Freud in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*? Intellectually that is, for it is just because our unconscious so well *recognises*, under the strangeness of the manifest tale, the depth and reality of the tragedy latently enacted, that each of Poe's stories stirs our instincts so deeply, however puerile they at times seem.

With the tales of *The Mother-as-Landscape*, the displacement of psychic intensities manifests itself in ever more forms and on a yet vaster scale. Our primary bent, to absorb the universe narcissistically, enables the libido with which we invest objects to attach itself to all our senses perceive, however microscopic or large; the seas, the earth's depths, the stars. Thus the mother, the first object we learn to differentiate from ourselves, is represented in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* not only by ships, or the strange white totem animal *Tekeli-li*, but also by the ocean, one of her universal symbols.

Again, in the burial-phantasy of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and more, even, of *The Gold-Bug*, the earth also symbolises the mother and, its "bowels", her bowels or womb. In its turn, too, in *The Unparalleled Adventures of one Hans Pfaall*, the pale, cold moon represents the mother, while the son's yearning for these symbolic mothers is revealed in the passion with which Poe's various heroes seek to explore and win the earth, the sky, the seas. In Poe's three sea-stories, the sea yawns into vast funnels down which the son precipitously returns to the place wherefrom he issued.

In that strange tale, *Loss of Breath*, with its indirect confession of Poe's impotence, it will not surprise us to discover many and varied instances of such displacements. The basic displacement, here, is that whereby affect

is transferred from the natural concern felt by all men in connection with their sexual potency, to a concern for lungs and breath. Here, too, Poe has resorted to one of humanity's consecrated symbols, for many theogonies attribute creative powers to their deities' divine breath. It would be beyond our scope to recall here all the displacements with which this tale abounds. The first "guilty" aggressive sex-attack by Mr. Lacko'breath was, as we saw, replaced by verbal aggression which resulted in his punishment; namely, the loss of breath inflicted by the castrating father in shape of Mr. Windenough; his being crushed by the fat gentleman in the diligence; his being dismembered by the surgeon and, again, his being perforated by the undertaker's screw; all, so many variants of the same theme. On the other hand, he is *rephallised* in the form of hanging. And erection is depicted by an endless swelling of the hero's body after he is hanged. Thus, the libidinal emphasis properly attached to the phallus is displaced on this swelling, which now appears as anxiety and the antithesis of the pleasures so much feared by Poe. Perhaps the only *motif* which appears almost unchanged is that of Elizabeth Arnold's "guilty" love letters, doubtless, because thus *isolated* in a distorted context, they seemed sufficiently disguised. This whole tale, which confesses Poe's tragedy, his impotence, is characterised by its reversed affect: it is a tragedy masquerading as burlesque. Representation by opposites, by which we disguise what we dare not openly express—which device we shall later discuss—dominates this tale. Nor is it by chance that even *rephallisation* is represented, ironically, by a limp, dangling body.

In the *Tales of the Murdered Mother*, displacement of affect is clearly revealed. The slayer-father, as imaged in the infantile sadistic concept of coitus, here appears as the mysterious unknown, the *Man of the Crowd*, "type and genius of profound crime" as, also, in the orang-outang of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. In one case, a dagger symbolises the piercing phallus; in the other, a razor. There is displacement, too, in the locked room of the Rue Morgue—which represents the mother as much as does old Madame L'Espanaye—and displacement once more in the chimney, which figures the maternal *cloaca* into which the daughter is thrust. Further displacements are the gouged-out eye of *The Black Cat* symbolising the castration wound, the cat's *rephallisation* in the form of hanging, and the cat as widespread symbol of woman and her genital organs.

In the *Tales of Revolt against the Father*, the psychic emphasis properly attached to the phallus is attached to *The Tell-Tale Heart*, while that in *The Cask of Amontillado*, proper to the maternal bowels, is shifted upon

Montresor's vaults. Indeed, all representations by courtiers, princes or kings, of the parents we knew as children, as in *Hop-Frog* or *The Red Death*, are so many displacements designed to render them unrecognisable for what they are, so that, unsuspecting, they may play their "guilty", libidinal parts.

The Devil who bets and wins Mr. Dammit's head, and the symbolic bridge which beheads him with its iron bracings were, as we saw, displacements first of the avenging father and then, of the danger-fraught vagina with its imaginary, fearsome teeth. Innumerable are the displacements which went to construct *The Pit and the Pendulum* nightmare. The cell as the contractile womb of the mother, the vaginal pit, and the penis-scythe of Time, are but the most striking. Finally, what shall we say of the sidereal displacements of that androgynous system *Eureka* or of its God who, like all great deities, is a displacement of the father on infinity; or, of the primal ejaculation of that God; or again, of the Particle Proper, that first spermatozoon from which, through irradiation or cellular fission, the Universe, child of God, was born?

But here we must interrupt our recital of these examples of displacement in the stories we have analysed. To instance them all would be almost to rewrite this book.

Of all the devices employed by the dream-work, that of the *displacement of psychic intensities*—apart from one exception—is the most freely used in the elaboration of works of art, doubtless because such displacement is generally dictated by the moral censor, which is more active in our waking thoughts than in sleep. The conceiving and writing of literary works are conscious activities, and the less the author guesses of the hidden themes in his works, the likelier are they to be truly creative.

* * *

The moral censor, as we see, employs displacement to veil from authors, as from dreamers, the nature of the instincts which dreams, or works of art, reveal. But there is yet another condition which creative work must satisfy, namely, *regard for representability*, although in less degree than is required by dreams or the plastic arts. This *regard for representability*, as Freud wrote in the passage earlier quoted, leads to fresh displacements which, in dreams, attach themselves to latent elements too abstract to fulfil the regard for representability needed to create dreams. Yet, in literature, we frequently find chains of abstract thought which would, with difficulty, find their way into dreams—as, for instance, Dupin's reasoning at the beginning of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* or

Legrand's deductions in *The Gold-Bug*. The dream, for instance, in the former, would have represented the comparison of the "ingenious" chess-player with the more "analytic" whist-player by simultaneously, or successively, presenting people playing whist and chess, the superiority of the whist players being conveyed in a final presentation of the latter. Nevertheless, the tendency to replace abstract concepts by sensory images, mainly visual, is apparent even in the elaboration of imaginative works. The appearance of *The Red Death* in Prince Prospero's palace, intended to represent the invading epidemic, is depicted by the entrance of a masked, blood-spattered, human form which strikingly and, visually, characterises the plague's symptoms. The *Angel of the Odd* also, in its way, "visualises" unconscious memories of the real fluid nourishment the child absorbed from its mother. Also, by a process of *condensation* which we shall soon meet again, the story similarly "visualises" the wish for other imagined excreted bodily foods which the child, later, wished to receive from the father who, then, had become the love-object. One of the substitutes, later, for this food, in the unconscious, is drinking with bosom cronies. All this, which could not be said directly, is visually expressed by the Angel's appearance—a creature composed of bottles and kegs of nourishing fluids, which it lavishes on the narrator while belabouring him with blows. Thus it recalls Poe's upbringing by John Allan.

In *Metzengerstein*, the son's incestuous union with the mother is magnificently visualised in the rider's mad rush while glued to his inseparable, symbolic charger. In *The Descent into the Maelstrom*, the return to the womb has all the immensity of a vertiginous plunge into the ocean's yawning chasm. Similar examples of intensely visualised displacements can be endlessly found, and described, in Poe's tales.

* * *

But here we shall pause to turn to another problem, observing that, of the four kinds of displacement mentioned as needed to fulfil the regard for representability, three are direct representations of the human body or certain of its parts.

May not, also, the first example, the plague figured as *The Masque of the Red Death*, be traced back to a human prototype? For the masker who sows the pestilence or Red Death is, as we saw, identical with the murdered Œdipal father who, by the talion law returns, in his turn, to become the slayer.

The other displacements with which we first dealt, resulting from the behests of the moral censor, also mostly end by representing human beings

in one shape or other. These generally human symbols, invariably derived from the human body, we have throughout found enlisted in the service of the displacement mechanism made necessary by the moral censor.

To the reader, our analyses may at times have seemed overmuch to stress these symbolic devices which, monotonously, bring everything in the universe back to the same human prototypes—father, mother, child, our members and organs and, in particular, the genitals. The fault, however, is not ours. We cannot help it that the unconscious monotonously reiterates certain themes, governed as it is by our most primitive memories and our most archaic instincts.

Now, of the two great instincts that govern our lives, hunger and love, hunger is much the less *psychological*, doubtless because the nutritive instinct is only in slight degree “compressible”. He who eats not, dies! This imperative instinct thus demands to be more or less satisfied and, as a result, has small opportunity to provide psychic substitutes for itself. But what turns the libidinal instinct, the libido, into the *psychological* instinct *in excelsis*, that whose derivatives and substitutes engage the whole psyche, is not only its compressibility (man, at need, may live without direct satisfaction of his erotism) but doubtless, also, the biological fact that the libido, like the psyche, stands in a specially close relation to the nervous system. So closely interwoven is the erotic instinct, and its dynamics, with other aspects of the psyche, that they seem quite impossible to separate out, as we see from that universal phenomenon sublimation, on which all our civilisations have been raised.

The initial auto-erotism of the nursling, with its diffused seekings for gratification, eventually enters a narcissistic phase where the child takes itself as its first love-object. In this phase, the child does not as yet distinguish its own body from the breast which suckles it, nor from the mother’s soft, warm body; only later does the mother become its first awareness of the outer world. By degrees its father, brothers and sisters, then the outer world, materialise behind the mother and, under the growing pressure of reality, become accepted by the child. The unconscious, however, finds means to revenge itself for thus being robbed of its omnipotence and the outer world, which destroys our primary, narcissistic illusions is, in its turn, *narcissised* by the unconscious. In this process, the child, ontogenetically similar here to our remote ancestors, passes through an animistic stage whose symbols still rule our souls, whether we be primitives or highly civilised; symbols which, doubtless, are its ineradicable vestige.

Thus it is that symbols for the body, the mother and father, their

genitals and ours, throng the unconscious and are projected into whatever the psyche produces, whether we sleep or wake. For, as instances from every domain of the spirit show:

“we need not assume that any special symbolizing activity of the psyche is operative in dream-formation; . . . on the contrary, the dream makes use of such symbolizations as are to be found ready-made in unconscious thinking, since these, by reason of their ease of representation, and for the most part by reason of their being exempt from the censorship, satisfy more effectively the requirements of dream-formation”.¹

Symbols succeed in satisfying both the conditions required for displacement; namely, the demands of morality and concreteness. Thus, we find they abound in mythology, art, and religion as, also, in dreams.

Poe's opus which, in any case, comes as near to the dream as is possible for any successfully conceived conscious production, is found to be especially rich in symbols; these help to instil that intense and visual eloquence which communicates direct from the unconscious of one individual to that of another.

* * *

Contrary to *displacement*, *condensation*, that other primary mechanism in the elaboration of dreams, appears to be less active in the elaboration of literary works than of dreams. In particular, it is responsible far less often for those nonsensical products, that seem to defy all logic, which we know as nonsense-dreams: products resulting from drastic condensation of convergent and, even, divergent thoughts. That difference, doubtless, inheres in the fact that literary creation is the product of the waking psyche. When we are awake, preconscious and conscious thoughts dominate, with their strivings for logic, and the unconscious is deeply buried. It is only, however, in the unconscious that condensation takes place. The unconscious, alone, is the crucible into which the preconscious thoughts, once they have sunk there, automatically, as it were, form those strange and at times ridiculous amalgams we know as “condensations”. It need not surprise us, therefore, to find that Poe's tales, though at times so similar to dream products, show less condensation than our dreams.

Condensation appears when, despite the conscious thought of the tale, deep unconscious processes are at work. Poe's women, with their “supernatural aura” were, as we saw, condensations of many of the women he loved: Berenice, Madeline and Eleonora, especially, reveal

¹ FREUD: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 332. op. cit. page 641, note.

characteristics of Virginia his small cousin, as much as of his mother Elizabeth. The Marchesa Aphrodite, in *The Assignment*, with her "statue-like" figure, condenses Mrs. Stanard, Elmira, Frances Allan and Elizabeth Arnold. The Marchese Mentoni, that grim avenger on his palace steps, recalls Judge Stanard and John Allan. Furthermore, the old man in *The Tell-Tale Heart* was shown to condense David Poe, his suppositious successor in Elizabeth's affections and, also, John Allan. Many such instances could be given, were we to seek out, in Poe's works, all those composite figures which—by over-determination, condensation and the fusion of many people's attributes into one—result in a general underlining of certain characteristics and, so, in the creation of those intense, almost mythical paternal or maternal figures which so strongly affect our minds. In effect, the purpose condensation fulfils is to produce affects more intense than those found in our latent thoughts, to which end it picks up and concentrates the scattered preconscious thoughts as they sink into the unconscious.

Suffice it if we again recall the figure that seems to come at the end of our scale, that of *The Angel of the Odd*, which condenses the father-concept (John Allan and his whippings), the mother (bottle = breasts), and milk (alcohol) as well as various bodily secretions, female or male, (again alcohol).

Passing to other types of condensation we find that, though the Marchesa Aphrodite and Poe's other composite figures are built up after "the method employed by Galton in producing family portraits",—by superimposing family likenesses one on another, "so that the common features stand out in stronger relief, while those which do not coincide neutralize one another and become indistinct",¹ condensation may also create hippogriffs and chimeras. The fantastic *Tekeli-li*² in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, by its cat's head reminds us of the mother and her genitals and, by its whiteness, of her milk. By its scarlet teeth and claws it also reminds us of the cannibal wishes which develop in the child with its growing teeth, and of the talion for its guilty wishes which the child imagines may be exacted by her teeth, or even vagina, in punishment not, now, for its cannibal wishes but for its incestuous desires. As to the long and prominent rat's tail, that doubtless is an offshoot of the *penis* which the child originally attributes to the mother, while the dog-like ears of the strange "cat" are perhaps borrowed from Tiger, Pym's dog, with its mother characteristics.

¹ *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 282-3.

² See pages 329, 336-8.

Again, a single manifest element may represent several which remain latent: Mr. Lacko'breath's lost breath, for instance, represents both creative male potency and intestinal flatus. In *The Gold-Bug*, the treasure is strongly over-determined and represents several hidden and implied sets of ideas. First, all the phantasies of real wealth which occupied Poe as the son of poor strolling players and, later, as the disinherited "son" of John Allan, reflect themselves in Captain Kidd's dazzling treasure. But beneath its superficial glamour, deep and unconscious drives lend power and conviction to the treasure theme. The unconscious memory of little Rosalie, born shortly before he visited the Carolina coast for the first time with his mother, and his ruminations on her birth, are what unconsciously inspire Legrand's inductions. As for the buried treasure they reveal, this emerges as a substitute for the infant sister whose sojourn in his mother's womb he had guessed.

The treasure itself, with its gold and precious stones, we saw revealed as symbols of the child's first "gifts"; the *fæces* which, in return for his own "generosity" in yielding his, she will exchange for a similar gift. We may recall in this connection the symbolic maternal animals which in *Peau d'Ane* and so many other legends, excrete gold in place of *fæces*. So too, it was from Frances Allan that Edgar desired these anal gifts, gifts expressed in *The Gold-Bug* in the classic, symbolic form of gold and jewels. Yet this gold was not Frances's, but John Allan's. When Frances heaped luxuries on her foster son, it was her husband's wealth which allowed her to do so. The child who, at first, had seen only the "mother's" generosity, must soon have seen from a dispute, word, or gesture that the money she spent came, in fact, from the man. Whence the equating of gold with the father's male potency and, so, penis.

Thus, as a result of factors specific to Poe's childhood and early life, the ancient and universal equation *fæces = gold = child = penis* declares itself, in this model tale, in the greatly condensed and sole theme of treasure.

* * *

Another psychic process however, the opposite, as it were, of condensation, even more frequently manifests itself in creative writing than in dreams; that by which one individual is split into several.

In *Morella*, *Ligeia* and *Eleonora*, the manifest forms of the first wives begin as condensations of the images of Elizabeth and Virginia; they then however split, to represent, separately, once more distinct from each other, the two images originally separate in the latent thought of the tale. The process to which we allude is thus only apparently at work, for the

second act, which restores the second Morella, Rowena, or Ermengarde, merely resolves the earlier condensation.

In *The Black Cat* however, we do, in fact, see the mother split into several characters: the slayer's wife, Pluto and the second cat all reproduce this one prototype. But, as ever in the unconscious, the diverse mechanisms involved in psychic elaboration function simultaneously. Through *displacement*, the psychic emphasis that belongs to the mother, is shifted on the unrecognisable cats or on the murderer's anonymous wife. Through *condensation*, in each of these three protagonists, the poet's mother Elizabeth has been fused with Virginia his wife and, what is more, has incorporated Catterina, Poe's cat, in two of them.

Also, the mechanism by which one character is split into several equally affects their derivatives. The mother, for instance, in whom other elements are so fused as to be no longer recognised, is also split into three. And each of these mothers has her own characteristics, as well as others common to all three. Though all three are symbolically castrated, either genitally, or by loss of an eye, thus declaring themselves all mothers, there was a time when Pluto had perfect eyes, a time of more virility than the second cat ever knew, though likewise a male. Thus, the three forms of the mother, in the tale, paint the mother from different angles. Pluto is first the phallic mother, at the time the small boy really believed in his mother's penis. But once Pluto has been symbolically castrated by the man, once the mother has been punished for introducing castration into the world, as witnessed by her body, the second cat appears with the large white splotch on its chest. This second cat represents the nursing mother pleading for pardon by her milk, by her life-giving breasts in lieu of the penis. Finally, in the murderer's wife, we see the mother's original human form emerge from under its totemic cat-disguise, in the same way that, with the ancient gods, the original form of the father reappears under their primitive totemic guises. And the double murder, that of the wife after Pluto, clearly reveals who, in the first instance, in cat form, was slain.

As for the father, we see him *multiplied* rather than *subdivided* in *Loss of Breath*, in the series of castrating fathers. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, the father is split into the two classic categories of good and bad father; on the one hand the good but weak captains, Barnard and Guy and, on the other, the rebellious mate and Too-wit, both evil but both eventually rendered impotent like the wicked grandfather with his futile cane. The only survivor, save for Pym, is Peters, himself split off from the author's *ego* and, so to speak, his heroic *ego-ideal*.

Nevertheless, the possibilities of such splittings of the father are limited: he can never be identified with matter in general; the earth and water. Per contra, the mother, as we saw in *The Fall of the House of Usher*, appears doubly determined as Madeline and the manor while, in *The Black Cat*, she appears as the wife, as both cats and, again, as the house with its cellar. Again, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* she appears both as a woman (the murdered old woman) and then as a room which, though all its orifices are sealed, is nevertheless forced open. In *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*, this defusion of the mother's entity possibly reaches its highest point, so generally is it attached to all objects for, though she is not revealed in her real form save as the white phantom which closes the tale, we nevertheless find her split up on every page and attached to all objects in nature: the sea and its waves, the earth and its streams and chasms, not to mention the symbolic ships, the dog Tiger and the *Tekeli-li*, each of which represents the mother, though with varying attributes.

When defusion attains such proportions, we may wonder, however, whether we can still, properly, speak of *splitting*—a term reserved for the splitting between individuals—for this special psychic mechanism, like a river confined, then loses itself in the vast and general ocean of symbolism.

The splitting-up of a single personality, moreover, seems far more appropriate to serve multiple representations of the *ego* than to depict either father or mother.

Freud writes, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*,

"There are also dreams in which my ego appears together with other persons who, when the identification is resolved, once more show themselves to be my ego. . . . I may also give my ego multiple representation in my dream, either directly or by means of identification with other people".¹

Again, in *The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming*, he says,

"It has struck me in many so-called psychological novels, too, that only one person—once again the hero—is described from within; the author dwells in his soul and looks upon the other people from outside. The psychological novel in general probably owes its peculiarities to the tendency of modern writers to split up their ego by self-observation into many component egos, and in this way to personify the conflicting trends in their own mental life in many heroes."²

¹ *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 308-9.

² p. 180. *op. cit.*, p. 639, note.

One can hardly apply the term "psychological novelist" to Poe in its literal sense, but in his eminently egocentric productions many examples of splitting the ego start to the eye.

First and foremost, *William Wilson*. We saw, in analysing this tale, how clearly Poe himself appears in the two William Wilsons; one, personifying his deepest instincts, the *id*, the other his super-ego or conscience; this last, derived by introjection from John Allan, the father. This instance is almost schematic and the fact that the author himself was partly aware of its conscious implications lends the tale a certain lack of warmth. Of more significance to us, because of the unconscious mechanisms at work, are the frequent examples where the ego is split in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. We have already seen that Dupin, the infallible ratiocinator, is Poe in person, the world decipherer of cryptograms and puzzles; a Poe who, in a field apparently purely intellectual, took his revenge for the sexual investigations in which, as a child, he had failed. But Dupin's friend the narrator, who observes and admires the infallible ratiocinator is once again Poe, this time as spectator, from outside, of his own final triumph. It is in the soul of this narrator, present in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, *The Purloined Letter* and *The Gold-Bug* that, as Freud says, the author dwells and looks out upon the other characters, father, mother, or split-off ego. The sailor, the owner of the orang-outang, is Poe again, but now the infant present at the parental sex-act, sadistically conceived. Thus, part of Poe's ego has attached itself to the father-figure orang-outang in his desire to identify himself with the father to whom the mother belongs. But only the merest allusion indicates this; the creature's youth.

Examples of such splittings-off of the ego might be multiplied in Poe's tales; a mechanism frequently employed in the representation found in creative writing. At its base, moreover, is found the displacement which helps to bring this about and, also, to achieve the *regard for representability* of the writer's material. Such splittings-off enable specific aspects and qualities of the ego to be personified and made concrete and visual. Thus, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the sailor visually embodies Poe's infantile curiosity, Dupin, his eager infantile investigations and the narrator his, doubtless, precocious bent towards self-observation.

* * *

So far, we have seen the same classic mechanisms at work, more or less, in the elaboration of imaginative literature and dreams; condensation, displacement and regard for representability; this last, like the moral

ensor, using displacement for its ends. The splitting of a single latent personality, in particular the author's ego, into several manifest characters, was found to be one way of obtaining *representability*, itself controlled by *displacement*.

When, however, we come to deal with the way in which literary creation seeks to express the *logical relation* of its themes, manifest or latent, we naturally expect to find it differ greatly from the construction of dreams. Literary creation, being a conscious product, is subject to reason and logic.

So, indeed, at first sight it appears, for the dream has no obvious means by which to represent logical relations,¹ while literature may command the whole range of conjunctions and prepositions. Thus, imaginative writing seems in general to obey the laws of logic and, in many cases, to be coherent to a high degree. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that though, on the surface, a literary work relates a manifestly coherent story, intertwined with it and, simultaneously, another and secret story is being told which, in fact, is the basic theme. Though, therefore, the manifest tale normally obeys the rules of logic, this deeper current is subject to other laws.

In this respect the work of art resembles every product of the human psyche in which the two great forces which dominate the psyche—the preconscious and unconscious proper—are simultaneously at work, though in different degrees. The contradiction between the preconscious latent dream thoughts, for instance, coherent and logical as they are, and the allogical incoherence imposed on the same thoughts by the dream-work once they have entered the unconscious, has been emphasised by Freud.² This same contradiction is found in creative writing and the degree in which the latent thought, itself coherent, appears incoherent and illogical, will depend on how nearly the work approaches the dream. Poe's works, in effect, fall into that category of literature which presents dream and nightmare characteristics in high degree. It need not therefore, at times, surprise us to see some loosening of the surface logic reveal the deeper allogical unconscious structure and the strange representations employed.

In *Ligeia*, for instance, the latent preconscious content of the tale seeks to express the theme: "*Because I continue fixated to my mother, I cannot love another woman.*" But before these preconscious thoughts could be

¹ Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pp. 296 ff. (*The Means of Representation in Dreams*).

² Freud: *op. cit.*, p. 545.

represented, they had to sink with the unconscious where, as a result of the infantile, archaic desire with which they were linked—that of re-finding the mother who forever dwells there—they acquired the power to emerge in the imagery of art. Thereafter, exactly as with dreams and their hallucinatory processes, the logical relation between two terms will only be expressed representationally, as in the substitution of the ghostly Ligeia's image for that of the dead Rowena. "It is *because* I am always there", the mother seems to be saying, "that it is as though other women did not exist for you". This is as though Poe himself were to declare: "*Because* I am still fixated on my mother, I cannot love another woman". Here, literature uses one of the dream's classic devices, the substitution of one person for another to express a causal relation. "*Causation*," says Freud, "is represented by succession, sometimes by the succession of dreams, sometimes by the immediate transformation of one image into another."¹ Thus Rowena-Virginia turns into Ligeia-Elizabeth; thus the first Berenice, the little cousin, at first dark of complexion and glowing with health, almost as suddenly, in the library, is metamorphosed into the corpse-like Berenice, whose haunting teeth and yellow hair recall the nightmare "Life-in-Death" of the Ancient Mariner. In both cases, the transformation is intended to express the same causal relation, the same ban upon women which his mother-fixation imposed on Poe. It is meant to express the same *because*.

In this passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams* which we have quoted, Freud shows how, in dreams, causation may also be expressed by succession in the different parts of the dream, the former and shorter portion being, as it were, the prologue to the main dream. May we not see an example of this type of causal representation in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*? Let us recall the episode concerning Chantilly which so arbitrarily, it seems, appears to precede the history of the ape's crime. There Dupin, from various clues, guesses the train of thought which, at that moment, has led his friend to think of the actor and, from the narrator's thoughts, evokes the ridiculous Chantilly. Earlier, however, we identified Chantilly as the second-rate player David Poe, Edgar's father. Thus, disguised as Chantilly, David Poe is represented to us as, in all respects, impotent. Immediately afterwards, without transition, there follows the tale of the crime whose victims were Mme. L'Espanaye and her daughter. The deep logical and causal relation between these portions of the tale, one being but the prologue to the other, seems thus

¹ Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 302.

suppressed; the only apparent link between them is the ingenuity Dupin displays in both instances.

Here, succession, once more, doubtless represents the causal relation. What needs inserting between the incident regarding Chantilly and the crime of the orang-outang is, again, a *because*! Poe's preconscious thoughts, sinking into the unconscious and losing their stiffening of logic, must have been something like this: "*Because* father David was impotent my mother yielded to the mighty *X* . . ." As we say, the ape doubtless represented that unknown lover, and the riddle set by the crime in the Rue Morgue was, doubtless, displaced from the riddle set the child Poe by the dubious fatherhood of his sister, Rosalie.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue provides other interesting instances of thoughts similarly presented piece-meal, though coherent enough in their latent content and manifest expression; coherent, that is, though in different ways, at the origin and end-point of the elaborative process.

What, indeed, could be more rational, seemingly, than the picture of an old lady living in her room? Yet as we saw, the old woman, like the room, represents one and the same person in the story's latent content; *i.e.*, the mother, although it would seem absurd that someone inhabit herself.

Contradictions, however, never disturb the unconscious and juxtaposition and, even superimposition of different elements, is only one of the ways it expresses an actual relation between them. The room, so generally a woman symbol, here represents, given its *hollowness*, the female genitals, into which the ape enters after forcing (violating) the window. We then get a reversal frequent in the unconscious; a *turning inside out*, with the contents substituted for the receptacle. The woman is then represented as inside this *cloaca* which, in effect, is inside her; at the same time its dimensions are greatly magnified, as though to throw into relief what was most stressed, psychically, in the author's preconscious; the woman's genitals rather than the woman.

Again, the *cloaca* reappears, in the same context, as the chimney into which Mlle. L'Espanaye's body is thrust. The mother is thus thrice represented; once in her human form and, twice, as an aperture in a building. But it is not the same *cloaca* that is thus twice represented for, while the room represents the *violated* *cloaca*,—as the headless old lady represents the castrated mother,—the chimney represents the pregnant *cloaca*. Mlle. L'Espanaye here, as it were, is the *fœtus*, conceived via the phallic-arm of the mighty ape.

Here we see the process of *isolation* in operation, a mechanism which separately represents each idea of a given context and each incident of one

representation, linked only by juxtaposition or superimposition. Only in the preconscious do time and space appear. The juxtapositions and superimpositions which result from the treatment to which the latent thoughts are subjected in the unconscious, per contra, are heedless of both logic and contradictions, as of time and place; thus, they express themselves in ways that seem absurd, if we relate them to the story's hidden content. However, these absurdities disappear in the manifest tale, for it is nowise absurd that an old lady lives in a room, nor that that room should have a chimney; it is even possible, at need, for an ape to perform everything with which it is credited in these murders in the Rue Morgue. But again, the deeper preconscious thoughts which inspire the tale and succeed in achieving expression via the strange elaborative mechanisms described are also, in their way, entirely coherent. One might formulate them thus: *So my mother was the victim of a man's (the suppositious lover's) aggression. He forced his way into her genitals and there, with his mighty penis, implanted my sister.*

* * *

We shall now observe the manner in which the unconscious treats such forms of conscious and logical thought as compose *negation*, *contrariety* and *identity*.

Latent and preconscious dream thoughts which involve contradiction or opposition, once they have passed into the unconscious, lose their power to express these relations directly since, for the unconscious, *negation* does not exist. Also, in creative writing (as in the creation of neurotic symptoms) whenever, within the unconscious, some profound unconscious infantile wish attracts a train of preconscious thoughts—and subjects them to the operations of the unconscious—such thoughts are found to be stripped of their negative aspect when they reappear in the conscious content.

One example of this process may be seen in the hanging themes in *Loss of Breath* and *The Black Cat* where, in both cases, the victim represents the penis. The hanged man thus represents the *rephallisation* of one who is genitally impotent. In the former, it is the author himself as Mr. Lacko'breath; in the latter, the mother in shape of the cat. The hanged man or animal all the more readily represents the phallus, in that it is popularly thought that hanging is accompanied by erection *in extremis*. But, from another angle, the fact that the body *hangs* makes it, again, represent incapacity to achieve erection and, thus, the very negation of potency. In this hanging theme, therefore, we find two diametrically opposed ideas condensed; virility and its negation.

Here we are reminded that many languages, in the remote past, attached opposite meanings to one and the same word. Ancient Egyptian offers many examples of this and modern languages, also, retain traces of the same primitive way of condensing contraries in a single form, thus associating them by contrast.¹ Both literature and dreams take full advantage of this mechanism already present in the unconscious. In *Loss of Breath* and *The Black Cat*, however, it seems introduced as a way of expressing deep irony. For though, true enough, hanging the wife or woman, or again the impotent man, on the one hand expresses the phantasy-wish: "Were it but otherwise!" on the other, owing to the mechanism of representation by contraries also included here, a mechanism which expresses derision *in excelsis*, this reattribution of the phallus to Mr. Lacko'breath and the Black Cat is something like adorning a cuckolded husband with horns; a mighty but derisive phallic symbol.²

So, too, with the eternal wandering to which the guilty father is condemned. The Man of the Crowd, the Wandering Jew, the Flying Dutchman and the Wild Huntsman, all, by contrariety, namely immortality, represent their death and the son's deep wish for that death.

As for cases where the manifest content of a tale shows the real situation reversed and opposite, these may serve, as in dreams, to express the wish for a similar reversal of the situation and the unconscious wish: "If only it were the other way round!" The best example of this in Poe is when M. Valdemar is hypnotised *in articulo mortis*. Here, Valdemar or Valdemar-Griswold-the Father is represented as utterly and passively subject to the son, who only keeps him alive the better to kill him; whereas, in reality, it was Poe who was passive towards the father.

Thus the tale, through its imagery, almost openly expresses its unconscious intent. The fusion of many individuals into one personage, which thus produces a composite image as, for instance, that of the Marchesa Aphrodite in which Mrs. Stanard, Frances Allan, Elmira Royster and Elizabeth Arnold are all condensed, similarly expresses and represents the underlying identity which links these different individuals in the writer's psyche. Indeed, owing to its predilection for condensation,

¹ Cf. Freud, *The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words*, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, pp. 184-191. Trans. from *Über den Gegensinn der Urworte*, 1910, *Ges. Werke*, Band VIII. In this essay Freud quotes from a work, dated 1884, by the philologist Karl Abel.

² Cf. Marie Bonaparte, *Du Symbolisme des trophées de tête*, *Revue française de psychanalyse*, 1927, tome. I, fasc. 4.

the unconscious seems better fitted to express *identity* than other relations.

* * *

What of tales such as *The Assignment* and its absurdities, even in the manifest content? It will be recalled that the Marchesa Aphrodite—in such despair when her babe falls into the canal and in such delight when the “stranger”, her lover, restores it to her—decides, in gratitude, to die with the rescuer next morning, at the same hour, though not in the same place. This is manifestly absurd, for the Marchesa would thus abandon her passionately loved babe to her husband, the stern old Marchese, as no Niobe, as she first seemed, would ever have done. A second absurdity also strikes us for, in rescuing the infant, the stranger plunges into the canal wrapped in a heavy cloak. Yet, as we saw when analysing this tale, these apparent absurdities are only the distorted expression of a perfectly coherent criticism by the preconscious. For, in the unconscious, the stranger’s rescue of the drowning child was equated with his giving her a child. The stranger, however, represents Poe, as the Marchesa represents his mother. Thus, this absurdity in the manifest content, in its way, expresses the following pronouncement in the latent content: “It is absurd to think I could have had a child by my mother. We can never be united except in death.” So strong, indeed, is the incest-prohibition that even though they die at the same moment, the lovers cannot die in the same place.

This way of expressing criticism is often encountered in dreams and we see that it is also to be found in literature. In dreams, it appears independent of the criticism and conscious judgments which may be expressed in the literary product composed, as that is, in the waking state.

However, we must certainly not think that every coherent train of thought in creative writing—especially in Poe’s tales—has its validity. We must not, for instance, allow ourselves to be dazzled by the ratiocination which marks the opening of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in connection with exactly how much ingenuity is needed for chess or mathematics or the analytic function, that superior faculty which, by sure and subtle observation, permits us to guess the thoughts, feelings and acts of others. True, there is here a conscious echo (only partly true, however, for chess has nothing to do with mathematics) of the two main divisions of mind; the *geometric faculty* and the *faculty of discrimination*.¹ Predominantly, however, the echo is of something very different, namely memories of the small Edgar’s infantile sexual investigations. For this highly-

¹ *Différence entre l'esprit de géométrie et l'esprit de finesse*. Pensées: Pascal, I. 1. 2. 4.

developed analytical faculty which he attributes to Dupin would, indeed, have been necessary to the child he then was, in order to solve the mysterious feelings and acts of adults. Strive as his childish curiosity might, that secret eluded him. It is the memory of this, to some extent, unsatisfied sex curiosity, which is here compensated by the triumphs of Dupin the ratiocinator.

Thus we see that the "ratiocinations" scattered through Poe's works are not to be taken at their face value and that even his passion for cryptography, shared with Legrand, may represent something different. We may conclude, therefore, that reasoning in literature, as in life, may be traversed by unconscious memories very remote from what reason, apparently, dictates.

* * *

What happens, respectively, to feeling, *affect* as we say, in dreams and literature? About dreams, psycho-analysis tells us that "*the ideational contents have undergone displacements and substitutions, while the affects have remained unchanged*".¹ Thus, dreams whose manifest content should imply terror may, nevertheless, totally lack that affect should the latent dream-thoughts, displaced on this part of the dream, in themselves be pleasurable. For example, Freud cites a woman's dream of three lions advancing upon her in which she had no feeling of fear. And with good reason for, actually, the lions represented her charming father, who had a mane-like beard, her English teacher, Miss Lyons and the composer, Loewe, who had just made her a present of some ballads. Contrariwise, some particular element in the manifest dream, apparently unimportant, may release a powerful affect if the latent thoughts it represents were originally invested with such affect. Affect would thus appear to be a constant but transferable (*labile*) emotional charge, able freely to displace itself along the dream's associative paths without loss of original intensity.

In other cases, however, the affect seems to expend itself in this process. Should the latent thought be powerfully charged with emotion the manifest dream will lack affect. (The converse, however, never happens.) This is because conflicting affects have neutralised each other, producing what Freud calls "peace after battle".

Another way in which affect is dealt with in the latent thoughts causes reversal of the latter into their contraries. The law of association by contraries provides an ample basis for this mechanism, one which is much employed by the moral censor as, also, by our wishes. Thus affects which

¹ Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 426.

seem morally objectionable to us, may be transformed into their opposites, as may painful affects into pleasant.

Rather than adduce instances of dreams illustrating these various mechanisms, I refer the reader to the chapter in *The Interpretation of Dreams* from which I have quoted. I shall confine myself to demonstrating that these mechanisms may be found in literature and in Poe.

Loss of Breath provides a typical instance of reversed affect. What more tragic, indeed, for one who is impotent than the loss of potency? Yet Poe's story, in which this confession of impotence is made, is saturated with buffoonish affect. At times, this buffoonery rings false and the basic and tragic affect manages to pierce through.

Again, the affect of great sadness doubtless experienced by Poe in connection with his addiction to alcohol, with all the profound infantile fixations and frustrated primal loves that covered, undergoes the same reversal into its opposite in *The Angel of the Odd*, a tale also intentionally buffoonish and extravagant, and far more successfully than *Loss of Breath*. In general, all Poe's tales, intended by him as 'burlesques, have similar foundations; a tragic affect, by reversal, is converted into its opposite and comic affect. As it happens, however, these reversals are never wholly successful; Poe's laughter is anything but contagious; it is always a ghastly grin.

Per contra, that other mechanism, the apparent *suppression* of affect, is dealt with successfully in *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, though to the prejudice of the dramatic effect. Possibly, this is because it is Poe's only tale in which the theme is manifestly sexual. Here, that mighty adversary, instinct, has thrown aside its disguise, whereupon all the forces of the moral censor draw up in line; the result is that a too equally matched struggle ensues and, as a result, that "peace after battle" which we have already noted. Thus, this story of the raped and strangled scent-shop assistant leaves us indifferent whereas, in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, we are moved to the depths by gripping instinctual affects which have succeeded in evading the censor in the simian or other disguises they were able to adopt.

Possibly why certain works leave us cold when, to the author, they seem full of fire and inspiration, is because a similar conflict between opposed affects has neutralised them out.

Nevertheless, the process to which affects are subjected, that which we meet most generally in Poe, especially in his finest stories, is of a wholly different order. In dreams and their elaboration, we regularly find that the unconscious affects originally bound to significant but repressed

representations, are transferred to representations which have generally arisen during the foregoing day. Often, it is as though their very unimportance determined the selection of the recent representations to which such affects are transferred, a phenomenon which, for ages, has attracted the notice of those interested in dreams. Freud has demonstrated that such a choice, in fact, appears to be determined by the moral censor, in order that the latent meaning of the dream be concealed. None the less, what remains of the day's experiences and links up with our earliest, strongest and most repressed wishes, must conceal some associative bond with the deeper desires which are seeking expression.

In Poe's works, as doubtless in creative art generally—where the artist's purpose is, as it were, to instil his own unconscious affect into the unconscious of his audience or, more exactly, to make both unconscious vibrates as one—what is of prime importance is that, as perceived, this transposition should be as close as possible, in affect, to the degree of affect it is intended to pass on. A *massing* of affects then takes place, a massing utilised by the censor to distribute affect as it will. No instance better reveals this mechanism than *The Pit and the Pendulum*, where the deep and unconscious affects which are to enter the very unconscious of the reader are, in effect, linked with representations of an especially infantile and deeply repressed nature; wish-phantasies to possess the mother in intra-cloacal fashion and passive homosexual wish-phantasies towards the father. All this, the inner inspiration of the tale and doubtless its original source, could never be conveyed, unchanged, to the reader since, far from pleasing him, his own repressions would cause him to shrink as, doubtless, many of our readers have already shrunk from our interpretations. Thus, the censor demands a displacement, but the process or *instance*, to which we shall later revert, which in our half-waking dreams determines the secondary elaboration of the dream and which, during the day, merges with our preconscious waking thoughts, this instance determines a displacement on objects endowed with affects analogous to the profound affect it is intended to release. These new manifest representations will still betray, to those with eyes to see, the deeper and original underlying representations; the phallic swinging pendulum and the cloacal pit. But the mighty and primal wish-affects bound up with these representations, once they have been repressed, cannot again emerge save as painfully charged anxiety. Thereupon, the wished-for pendulum, and the longed-for pit, must themselves be invested with anxiety and must convey terror. In this manner, affect is piled-up with maximum effect and the manifest content of the tale will contain a sort of *preliminary premium*

of anxiety to serve as the magnet to draw out and explode the deep, unconscious anxiety thus liberated. Meanwhile, the censor's behest is also obeyed and carried out, for the reader may think that the terror, released by the tale, is merely what anyone would feel in the cells of the Inquisition.

A certain analogy may be noted here with what happens in the formation of many neurotic symptoms. The phobia of fearing to cross streets because of automobiles, for instance, is rational in part, since motor cars kill people. People with this phobia thus manage to justify themselves as regards their affect. But the *quantity* of this affect is not justified by the manifest representation of such a problematic disaster, and can only be explained by over-determined affect, resulting from affects which have re-emerged from deep and hidden sources in the unconscious.

The overwhelming anxiety with which all Poe's greatest tales are charged, issues exclusively from this source. In each instance the pre-conscious selects a manifest representation associated with painful affect, as a result of which *preliminary premium of anxiety*, the underlying unconscious anxiety can be discharged. In such manner were liberated the mighty affects we feel, for instance, in *Berenice*, *Ligeia*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and *The Black Cat*.

Of the last and remaining factor in dream-formation, *secondary elaboration*, we may say that, in creative writing, it is entirely merged with the processes of preconscious waking thought and that a derivative process is the more or less wakeful residue of the day's thoughts, active in dreams. It is this *secondary elaboration* which, in dreams, when the opportunity offers, corrects too flagrant absurdities and establishes a new and manifest coherence between the latent and scattered thoughts which often differs greatly from their original latent coherence: in short, it subjects the dream to the censorship of logic and criticism. As regards the inner coherence, however, of literary works, this is established by the waking preconscious thoughts which select or reject the elements suggested in the primary unconscious elaboration of the latent thoughts, eliminate what is too absurd or shocking and set up new logical connections between what is kept. In short, they are incessantly at work criticising and constructing in order to fit, to our most deeply repressed desires, that conscious, logical and æsthetic façade which we call creative writing and which, it must never be forgotten, generally presents itself with a coherence very different from that which prevails in the

preconscious and primitive thoughts which inspire works of art.

* * *

Nevertheless, despite the essential differences which mark off literary, from dream, creation—the lesser mental and psychic regression which materialises even the most abstract thought as hallucination; the egotism, so far better masked than in dreams; the æsthetic pleasure-premium which allows repressed desires to manifest themselves with impunity and with equal impunity be experienced by others—despite these differences which make creative writing, contrary to the dream, a *social* product which all may share, dreams and art fulfil an analagous function as regards the human psyche. Both, in fact, act as safety valves to humanity's over-repressed instincts.

At night, when sleep commands immobility, we can dream with impunity, to others or ourselves, of all we covet and are refused by life; murder even, or incest. During the day, we can also abandon ourselves to our daydreams and be similarly immobile, thus inhibiting our dangerous motor activities. But there are men with a mysterious gift who can clothe these daydreams and fictive instinctual gratifications in forms which allow others, also, to dream their dreams with them. How this is done, and what is the nature of the pleasure-premium of form and beauty which draws their fellows, is an æsthetic problem still unsolved. Nor has psycho-analysis really succeeded in explaining it, despite the depths to which it has probed the psyche. Freud merely asks us to note that æsthetic feeling seems related to erotic emotion, though sublimated, it is true.¹ This, Plato had already divined in the *Phædrus*, where the love of beautiful youths was suggested as the first step to love of the Beautiful.

Meanwhile, psycho-analysis has taught us that, throughout our lives, emotively and in disguised ways we repeat the affective experiences of our childhood. The artist, who creates beauty, is no less subject to this law and,

¹ "I have no doubt that the conception of the 'beautiful' is rooted in the soil of sexual stimulation and signified originally that which is sexually exciting. The more remarkable, therefore, is the fact that the genitals, the sight of which provokes the greatest sexual excitement, can really never be considered 'beautiful'." Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, New York, Nervous and Mental Disease Publ. Co., 1930, p. 20, footnote. Trans. from *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, 1905. *Ges. Werke*, Vol. V.

Freud has returned to the same idea on other occasions in the same work. See also Chapter II of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, London, Hogarth Press, 1930, trans. from *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, 1930. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIV.

possibly, is even more so than others, due to his essentially narcissistic make-up. We may therefore well assume that his particular æsthetic will be coloured by his first love-relations. Since, for all human beings the first love object was the nurturer or mother, it will not surprise us to observe that the æsthetic ideal of an artist presenting necrophilist features, such as Poe, for instance, wears the hues of the mother's death. In the most literal sense, all beauty, for Poe, whether in woman or nature, in faces or scenes, was "drawn from the cheeks" of the cherished and dying mother.

We agreed that there are artists whose æsthetic ideal appears less directly derived from the concrete qualities of an infantile love-object; artists with whom we could not thus hark back to the source. Nor need the mother, indeed, be the only origin of the artist's æsthetic ideal. The love which every child, at some time or other, feels for the father, must contribute distinctively masculine and active characteristics to any æsthetic ideal, as we find also in Poe.

Nor must we forget the further fact that all love-feeling is dual, and comprises the loved object and loving subject. Earlier, we dealt with the qualities the artist's æsthetic ideal borrowed from his infancy's love-objects. But there are also differences in the manner in which people love; differences conditioned by constitution, heredity and infantile happenings which modify the developing libido and by the greater, or less, congenital strength of one or other libidinal factors such as sadism, *voyeurism* and the rest. We must therefore distinguish between the *kind of æsthetic emotion* in a given artist, and the *nature of his æsthetic ideal*.

Clearly, the former is least accessible to our enquiries as containing factors impossible to trace; factors such as the original strength of the libido and its diverse elements and their greater, or less, resistance or plasticity to educative pressure and their greater, or less, capacity for sublimation: in short, all those hereditary and constitutional biological and sexual factors before which psycho-analytic investigation must, perforce, halt.

* * *

Nevertheless, whatever the artist's primary make-up and however the form of his æsthetic—that glittering veil which he wraps about his and our own deepest instincts, instincts which his contemporaries would often condemn—the elaboration, like the function of the work of art, is *always* the same.

With the elaboration-mechanisms in creative writing we have already dealt at length. Their function, as we have shown, is that of a safety-valve for our over-repressed instincts. It now remains for us to show, with Poe

as our example, that this safety-valve operates under waking conditions exactly as do dreams in respect to our instincts.

To that end, we once more revert to Freud's famous comparison dealing with dream-formation. Recent events in the sleeper's life—the so-called residue of the day—may be likened to the *entrepreneur* of economic theory. But the *entrepreneur* can accomplish nothing without capital! The *capital* of the dream is furnished by the ancient, archaic, infantile wishes reactivated by the happenings of the day, for these last, even when most vivid in consciousness, of themselves would be unable to activate the dream activity. The genesis of works of art may be similarly described.

Whereas, in many of Poe's tales, the elements in this partnership perforce elude us, in so far as concerns the factors which inspired the creative process, in others it stands clearly revealed.

From the available evidence, it would seem clear that *Berenice*, *Morella* and *Ligeia* came into being as a result of the carnal temptations experienced by Poe at finding himself near to his young cousin Virginia, when first staying with his aunt, Mrs. Clemm. Another man, however, might have seen Virginia without wishing to marry her, or being inspired to write *Berenice* or *Ligeia*. Virginia here, therefore, represents the *entrepreneur*, but the capital for the undertaking could only have been furnished by Poe's rich store of buried sadistic, necrophilist, infantile memories which, with his mother's corpse, lurked deep in his unconscious.

So, too, with *The Black Cat*. The residual material of the day, in this nightmare-tale, came from his family life with the dying Virginia. Was not Catterina, the cat, her constant companion in their cottage? When, in winter, they lacked fuel and the poor, weak, blood-spitting consumptive was forced to remain in bed, would not the cat curl on her bosom as if to warm her?¹ Nevertheless, touching and pitiful though this was, it would never have inspired *The Black Cat*, had not the treasure of stored-up, ancient, sadistic urges bound, in Poe's unconscious, with his dead or dying mother, been stored up already in his soul to furnish the Virginia-Catterina enterprise with that once amassed capital.

The actual impetus to write *The Gold-Bug* was doubtless communicated to Poe by his poverty, and the wish to change it for something better. Did he not, in fact, write it to compete for a prize of \$100, a competition in which he was successful? Yet all his real desires for riches would never have lent such glamour to Captain Kidd's treasure but for its latent

¹ Cf. page 137.

meaning, one so intimately bound with his deepest, most primitive, instincts. For, beyond the memory of Frances Allan and her motherly generosity, there still lay the mystery surrounding the birth of Rosalie who, as a babe, had accompanied him, and their mother, to the very shores where Kidd once buried his treasure.

Thus, works of art, like dreams, reveal themselves as phantom presences which tower over our lives, with one foot in the past and one in the present. The phantom's face, however, turns to the future; due to the sovereign wish it embodies; a wish which inspires our every activity. That is why dreams, at times, seem prophetic; namely, when our more or less unconscious efforts succeed in achieving the wish they express. But, since such wishes are still more generally condemned by our consciences than externally thwarted, few of our dreams, indeed, come to pass! The same prohibitions are at work in art. Though *The Gold-Bug* may have won Poe \$100 and, next to *The Raven*, his greatest success, he would never, in fact, be able to gratify the murderous, sadistic urges he expresses in *The Black Cat*. Nevertheless, by choosing an obviously consumptive girl for his wife, the dreamer-necrophilist Poe found means to stage the sadistic drama, for himself, of an agonising death like that he had watched so breathlessly as a child. Thus his heroines, Berenice, Morella, Ligeia, Madeline and Eleanora, seem prophetically to anticipate his own adored wife's fate.

Edgar Allan Poe, doubtless, had never any clear realisation of the memories he thus immortalised in his works, nor of the fearful nature of his own sexuality. True, he did, at times, say he was haunted by a "terrible mystery" but, what that was, he could not say. As to sex, he denied and suppressed, in himself, every sexual manifestation to a love-object, though "etherealising" its every grim aspect in his works.

Yet, what lay deepest below Poe's works was as clearly sensed by others, as it was little understood by Poe. Plead chastity's cause as it might, Poe's opus, to many, seemed to embody all evil, perversity and crime. To some, indeed, Poe seemed little better than a confirmed criminal. Apart from the bad poet's natural envy of the good, and the old male rivalry for Mrs. Osgood's diaphanous graces, much of the same sincere indignation doubtless dictated the ex-cleric's, Rufus Griswold's, condemnatory attitude to Poe. This is the only circumstance that extenuates Griswold's malevolent publication of the "Ludwig Article"¹ the very day after his death, and his

¹ Griswold, R. W., The "Ludwig Article", *New York Tribune*, (Evening Edition), October 9th, 1849, (*Virginia Edition*, Vol. 1, pp. 348-359.)

issue of the venomous *Memoir*¹ which, as executor, he prefaced to the posthumous edition of Poe's works.

Nevertheless, the supreme, forbidden, instinctual urges thus sung by Poe; urges which he himself hardly comprehended and which exceed those our love instinct is permitted to gratify, cast such a spell on mankind that even in his life there rose a chorus of adulation.

Women, in particular, were conquered by his works as, indeed, they are so often by sadism. Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Shelton would have wedded the Raven and Mrs. Shew and Mrs. Richmond mothered and consoled him.

Soaring far over the Atlantic, Poe's sado-necrophilist genius was destined to awake, in other countries and hearts, the same mighty and eternal instincts of those who recognised themselves in him.

¹ *op. cit.*, page 176, note 2.



CHARLES BAUDELAIRE
1821-1867
(from the photograph by Nadar)

CHAPTER XLVI

Poe's Message to Others

... I can tell you something even stranger, almost incredible", a young Frenchman wrote about 1860.

"In 1846 or 1847, I came across some fragments by Edgar Poe: they had an amazing effect on me. And as his collected works were not gathered together until after his death in a uniform edition, I took the trouble to establish connections with Americans living in Paris, in order to borrow their files of newspapers edited by Poe. And then, believe it or not, I found stories and poems that had been in my mind, though vague and confused and weakly constructed, which Poe had known how to arrange and bring to perfection."¹

Baudelaire himself confesses it was as though, there, under his eyes, he had found not only subjects but, even, sentences in his mind . . .

Admiration and love for the American was utterly to "possess" the Frenchman, to use his friend Asselineau's words. Baudelaire could think of nothing, talk of nothing, but Poe. And he resumed his study of English, neglected since childhood, in his desire to present Poe to France.

We shall not go into all the vicissitudes of the pious effort Baudelaire devoted to Poe, in translating him for over seventeen years. What interests us here is what caused this sudden "love at first sight", and the "psychic" accord of the two geniuses.

But before we embark on this, let us first briefly retrace the main facts of Baudelaire's life.

* * *

Charles Baudelaire was born on April 9, 1821, in Paris. His father, François Baudelaire, was then over sixty. Under the ancien régime, when

¹ Baudelaire to Armand Fraisse, quoted by Eugène Crépet in *Charles Baudelaire: étude biographique*, Jacques Crépet, Paris, Albert Messein, 1928, p. 95. All the details in my short biographical sketch of Baudelaire are taken from this authoritative and exhaustive work.

tutor to the aristocratic Choiseul-Praslins, he had frequented many of the philosophers and artists of the eighteenth century. Subsequently, under the Empire, he became head of a department of the Senate. Later, when Napoleon fell, he resigned and took up painting.

Late in life he wedded again, this time Caroline Archimbaut-Dufays, an orphan, thirty-four years his junior. She it was, who, in 1821, gave him a son.

François Baudelaire loved his son dearly. As soon as he could walk he would lead him to the nearby Luxembourg Gardens, telling him stories as they went. His sensitive face, framed in long white hair, made him seem the infant's grandfather.

And, like a grandfather, he soon disappeared, for he died in 1827. Caroline was a widow and little Charles, at five, in whom there already beat the jealous heart of a lover, had her all to himself.

"There was in my childhood", the poet was later to write to his mother,¹

"a period of passionate love for you: listen and read without fear. I have never said as much to you before. I remember being with you in a carriage, you had come out of a nursing-home to which you were sent, and you showed me, to prove that you thought of your son, some pen and ink drawings you had made for me. Do you see what a cruel memory I have? Later, the Place Saint-André-des-Arts and Neuilly. Long walks, and always affection and caresses! I remember the embankments, so sad at evening. Ah! those were the good times of motherly love. I ask pardon for calling *good times* what doubtless were bad for you. But all the time I was living in you: you were uniquely mine. You were at once an idol and my chum. Perhaps it will astonish

¹ Charles Baudelaire: *Lettres inédites à sa mère*. May 6th, 1861. Paris, Louis Conard, 1918, p. 227. "Il y a eu dans mon enfance, une époque d'amour passionné pour toi; écoute et lis sans peur. Je ne t'en ai jamais tant dit. Je me souviens d'une promenade en fiacre; tu sortais d'une maison de santé où tu avais été reléguée, et tu me montras, pour me prouver que tu avais pensé à ton fils, des dessins à la plume que tu avais faits pour moi. Crois-tu que j'aie une mémoire terrible? Plus tard, la place Saint-André-des-Arts et Neuilly. De longues promenades, des tendresses perpétuelles! Je me souviens des quais, qui étaient si tristes le soir. Ah! ç'a été pour moi le bon temps des tendresses maternelles. Je te demande pardon d'appeler *bon temps* celui qui été sans doute mauvais pour toi. Mais j'étais toujours vivant en toi; tu étais uniquement à moi. Tu étais à la fois une idole et un camarade. Tu seras peut-être étonnée que je puisse parler avec passion d'un temps si reculé. Moi-même j'en suis étonné. C'est peut-être parce que j'ai conçu, une fois encore, le désir de la mort, que les choses anciennes se peignent si vivement dans mon esprit."

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you that I can speak with such emotion of a time so long past. It astonishes me too. Perhaps it is because, once again, I feel the wish to die, that these ancient things draw themselves so vividly in my mind."

The good times whose praises he here sings with a passionate warmth it would be vain to seek throughout Poe's etherealised constructions, is the rapture of the small son left in sole possession of the mother; the rapture of a small Œdipus after the death of old Laius. And it was this period—his mother a widow and staying at Neuilly—of which he was later to sing as of a *Paradise Lost*.

Je n'ai pas oublié, voisine de la ville,
Notre blanche maison, petite mais tranquille;
Sa Pomone de plâtre et sa vieille Vénus
Dans un bosquet chétif cachant leurs membres nus,
Et le soleil, le soir, ruisselant et superbe,
Qui, derrière la vitre où se brisait sa gerbe,
Semblait, grand œil ouvert dans le ciel curieux,
Contempler nos dîners longs et silencieux,
Répandant largement ses beaux reflets de cierge
Sur la nappe frugale et les rideaux de serge.¹

Indeed, it all reads much more like a lover's yearnings than the memories of a son. But this son was a passionate lover, with all the psychic drive that implies, a drive that includes sexual desires.

Was he not later to write in veiled and sensual terms: "The precocious taste for women. I mistook the smell of fur for that of woman. I remember. . . . Anyway, I loved my mother for her elegance. So I was a precocious dandy".² Let us translate "dandy", here, by lover.

Mariette, "the big-hearted" servant who looked after the child, and of whom Madame Baudelaire was jealous, could not hope to compete with such perfume and elegance, despite her dog-like devotion to the small boy which left so indelible an impression on his heart and the regret that his mother, who so soon proved unfaithful, could not love him, and him alone, in the same way.

¹ *Les Fleurs du Mal*: "Tableaux Parisiens", XCIX.

I have not forgotten our quiet small house outside town, nor its time-worn Venus or the Pomona of plaster masked by the spindly thicket: nor the sun splintering in splendour on the window. It seemed like a huge eye in the peering heavens, pondering over our long silent dinners, while its lovely candlelight poured on our frugal cloth and the serge curtains.

² *Fusées*, XXI, in Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres posthumes et correspondances inédites*: Biographical foreword by Eugène Crépet. Paris, Quantin, 1887.

For, in November 1828, Caroline married Battalion Commander Aupick. Thus did his mother, despite her tenderness, her smiles and the sweetness of their mutual love that summer at Neuilly, prove unfaithful to him. Thereupon, something in little Charles's heart perished, a fate which befell even his love of nature, that other mother who had also betrayed him by glowing with such deceptive splendour on the love which he and his mother shared so exclusively at Neuilly. Thenceforth, Charles was to hate the beauties of nature, and jealousy, rancour and regret would fill his embittered heart. Not for nothing did he invent a tale of stealing his mother's bedroom key on her wedding night and flinging it into a fountain. Later also he wrote that, as a child, the violence of his feelings had been equal to a man's. It was true enough, but not as exceptional as, in his artist's pride, he imagined. How much the seven-year-old boy suffered, everything he later produced would show.

My readers, doubtless, already know all this. It is now the accepted thing to attribute all Baudelaire's misogyny to his mother's marriage, not to mention the bitterness that filled his life and his works; works which eternally re-echo the same anguish, hatred and vengeance for a love betrayed.¹

Caroline was gentle, kind, perceptive, but not very intelligent; and in addition was rather frivolous and full of bourgeois prejudices. Though she loved her son tenderly, she did not understand his character; indeed, his passions, his intellect, overwhelmed her. Aupick was a meticulous, upright soldier, bound to dislike a rebellious poet, even though he did all he considered his duty towards his stepson.

Charles was packed off to school as a boarder. The officer, naturally, had faith in the salutary influence of the dreadful school-discipline of the time. At Lyons, and in Paris, Charles showed himself a mediocre and undisciplined pupil and, at eighteen, got himself expelled from the Lycée Louis-le-Grand.

¹ Cf. François Porché, *La Vie douloureuse de Charles Baudelaire*, (Paris, Plon 1926) and Dr. René Laforgue: *L'échec de Baudelaire*, étude psychanalytique (Paris, Denoël et Steele, 1931). This latter work puts forward a somewhat different theory. According to Laforgue, though he accepts the son's strong reaction to his mother's remarriage, Baudelaire would none the less have developed as he did, had there been no Major Aupick, since the early sex experiences and primary traumas which decided his character and neurosis were doubtless established before his mother's remarriage. I, too, believe, as does every analyst, that childhood happenings are decisive, as also that constitutional factors cannot be ignored, but agree with the general idea that his mother's remarriage was the most strongly charged traumatic and decisive event in Baudelaire's character and life.

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Having, nevertheless, passed his baccalauréat, Charles informed his parents that he wished to devote himself to letters. Lamentations and objurgations proved unavailing: he remained immovable.

Charles was now never indoors. He idled and led a life of debauchery. And with what women! His mother had not deceived him in vain by "prostituting" herself to a man when he was seven, after beguiling him with her lying tenderness! From that moment, the need established itself to despise women, to equate his mother with prostitutes and as a result, to seek low women. Thus, at this time, he had Sarah la Louchette, "a frightful Jewess", "who had warmed his heart in her hands", and others of the same kidney. Also, he contracted syphilis.

Meanwhile rebellion was growing in the poet's heart. One night, at a dinner party, the young man made some objectionable remark and was soundly rated by M. Aupick. Charles then rose and livid with rage said coldly: "Sir, you have gravely insulted me. Correction appears necessary and it will be an honour to strangle you". M. Aupick then slapped Charles who had an attack of hysterics. A family council ordained that the criminal be banished.

Now Baudelaire, on higher orders, sails for the South Seas and lands at Mauritius. But, as it happens, the trip, arranged for his moral benefit, results in something very different. For, apart from exotic visions of the tropics which were to haunt his future writing, the deeply buried sado-erotic elements of his nature also sprang to life. He saw a Mauritius negress whipped publicly for a small theft. It would seem that, at the time, the scene was repugnant to him but, when he returned to France, it went on running in his mind. Thus he later wrote: "all the details of the scene return to the voyager's mind: It is cruel and yet grotesque and somehow the whole thing is indecent. And from this complex mixture a belated, pointless, but clinging lechery is born . . ."¹

Meanwhile Charles attained his majority and received the 75,000 francs, more or less, left him by his father. At last he is free! Whereupon he leaves home, with only a short note to his mother by way of explanation. Thus he repays her one time "desertion".

Soon afterwards, in a little theatre near the Panthéon, he discovers Jeanne Duval, a tall and sinuous half-caste with a small waist and big hips, who suddenly and savagely fires his senses and the scene at Mauritius is

¹ Porché: *op. cit.*, p. 57. All details of the trip to Mauritius are taken from E. Crépet, among which that of the whipped negress (Eugène Crépet, XXVI). It is Porché who has emphasised the particular importance of this episode in the development of Baudelaire's sexuality.

reactivated, that flagellation-scene which only revived the deep and vengeful sadism dormant, since infancy, in the man's heart, owing to that first, early deception.

Thus their liaison begins and will endure until the poet's death; a liaison with a "stupid, bestial, woman" who does not "admire him at all"; a liaison punctuated with furious quarrels. His hatred and scorn of women, acquired as a child through his mother's betrayal, he now manages to justify a hundredfold in his adult choice of a mate.

Soon, so little is left of his patrimony that Baudelaire is put under tutelage. After which, the letters he writes his mother ask so repeatedly for money, that one might mistake them for begging-letters. Under these repeated demands for money, however, the psycho-analyst knows that pleadings for love lie concealed. When he begs her for fifty or a hundred francs, it is ever and always love which he begs from his mother as when a child; love expressed in its anal aspect, money. Thus, the mother must go on feeding her child. No matter that the money is M. Aupick's; mother-love should be a taking from the less-beloved to bestow on the best-beloved! Besides, these constant demands were a way of retaliating on his mother, torturing her in typically Baudelairean sadistic-love fashion. Also, of torturing himself by incurring rebuffs and, so, remaining loveless and without money.

True, they had their furtive and lover-like meetings, in museums or sunny parks, according to the season but these, clearly, could never content the ardent demands of so jealous a son. Jeanne only quenched his sensual hunger and still more imperative need to despise women. Tobacco, drink, hashish or opium, all these "artificial heavens" were but so many substitutes for the infantile ecstasies he had once sucked from the mother's body. Even his poems, which sing so magnificently of the inextricable minglings of love and hate, and thus bring relief to our over-repressed instincts, flower seldom and laboriously in immense wastes of boredom and impotent spleen; that *boredom* which Baudelaire has best described.

Then, in 1846, he discovered Poe and we have seen its effect. In Poe, he believed he had found a brother, equal in genius and in fate: thus, he began to translate him. That brother was to walk with him all his days. Two years before his death, in 1865, he published his last translation: *Histoires grotesques et sérieuses*.

Betweenwhiles, Baudelaire became a passionate supporter of the Revolution of '48, chiefly in the hope that General Aupick would be slain in it. After which he once more became the dyed-in-the-wool conservative he had always been, whether in reaction to his own rebellious instincts, or

through fidelity to the memory and aristocratic traditions of his real father François.¹

With time, Jeanne ages, demoralised by drink and disease. One night, during a quarrel, Charles all but kills her with a side-table and then gives up their common life, although still continuing to visit his black Venus. At times he visits other cheap women whose addresses we yet see in his "love note-book"; but the fundamental split in his sex life sundry instances reveal.²

Parallel with such infamous connections, however, went a whole string of "spiritual" love-relations from which sex seemed entirely absent. In these, Baudelaire "the depraved" could love platonically, much like Poe. This we see from his relation with the young actress Marie Daubrun, as well as with "Marie", who gave up being an artists' model after a talk they had. Baudelaire, in these instances, was not only able to love purely, but was quite incapable of loving in any way else, as the beautiful and brilliant Aglaé-Apollonie Sabatier was soon to perceive. For, after Baudelaire had spent five years sending her his poems she thought she would make him the happiest of men. This happened just after the *cause célèbre* of *Les Fleurs du Mal* but Baudelaire soon made it clear that this was not at all what he wanted.

In 1857, which saw the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, General Aupick died and Caroline was again left a widow. Charles is no longer tied to his Jeanne and can at last live with the mother he has always adored; his room is ready at Honfleur, in the "toy-house" where she retired and awaited him. Never, however, does he manage to join her; he has always something or other to do, something he, nevertheless, always puts off, which keeps him in Paris. The hate, rancour and thirst for revenge, once instilled by his mother's "treachery", still seem to check his eagerness to fly to her despite the obstacles that no longer exist. True, his letters to her, after the General's death, increase in tenderness as in intimacy. But only once does he manage to spend six months at Honfleur. Then, in 1864, he leaves for Brussels, setting the frontier between them. That he was beset by money difficulties, we know; but his endlessly repeated tergiversations, then flights, are equally patent.

¹ Did he not carry with him, from hotel to hotel, throughout his wandering life, a large portrait of his father? (I quote Jacques Crépet.)

² Cf. Freud, *Contributions to the Psychology of Love*: (II) *The most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life*, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, pp. 203-216. Trans. from *Über die allgemeinste Erniedrigung des Liebeslebens*, in *Beiträge zur Psychologie des Liebeslebens*, 1912. *Ges. Werke*, Band VIII.

Poe and the Human Soul

In Belgium, Baudelaire is more wretched than ever. The Belgians do not understand him and there is little for him to do. Besides, he is ill. Since 1860, it seems, he has been subject to various ailments, precursive of the disease that will end his days. Now "rheumatism" continually harasses him. His condition worsens and he has splitting headaches that nothing can assuage. In March 1866, while at Namur, visiting *l'église Saint-Loup*, Baudelaire collapses. He is transported to Brussels with hemiplegia and aphasia, finally struck down by syphilis of the brain.¹ Brought by his mother and friends to Paris, he passes away, the following year, in a nursing home.

* * *

Such was the man who thought he had found a brother in Poe. How far was he justified? Doubtless, the study of this problem will enable us to form a clearer view of the subject-matter of this chapter; namely, Poe's message to others. Thus, by entering Baudelaire's territory, detour though it seems, we shall the better find our way.

Let us first note that Baudelaire, who so strongly *felt*, and truly, his psychic relationship to Poe, had nevertheless no *understanding* of its real basis since, for that, he would have had to understand himself. But nowhere does he seek to explain the psychic relationship between them.

Moreover, in the two critical studies he devoted to Poe,² the portrait Baudelaire traces of his distant model, powerful and absorbing as it is, is also distorted, idealistic and romantic. Poe, in this wise was, at it were, an unhonoured bard lost in the "barbarous gas-lit wastes" of the then America—to which environment all his woes were due; a bard who sought oblivion in his cups from a hostile world of which he was both sport and victim, even though he deliberately managed to draw inspiration from those cups. All responsibility for the woes that dog poets' lives is thus disclaimed and projected on the obdurate outer world. Thus Baudelaire—like Poe—finds absolution from all the "sins" and guilt which so oppressed him through his life.

The absolution which psycho-analysis, depth-psychology, extends to suffering man, from the humblest to the highest, is juster and more all-

¹ This is the most likely diagnosis, given the patient's age and life. Laforgue assumes it to be so in the work already quoted, and Dr. Logre confirms it.

² *Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres* par C. B. Preface to *Histoires extraordinaires. Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe*, par C. B., Preface to *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*.



CHARLES BAUDELAIRE
(from a self-drawing in the possession of Armand Godoy)

Poe's Message to Others

embracing. It does not deny, but seeks to understand the forces which determine man's nature from within.

* * *

To what extent, however, was Baudelaire right in seeing a brother in Poe?

Let us first take the external similarities and differences in their lives.

The similarities leap to the eye. Both were misunderstood by "fathers",—in each case substitutes of the real father—who were eminently practical, bourgeois and prosaic, and would not hear of poetry as a career. Both again had loving, though weak mothers—Frances or Caroline—who were helpless to protect their children. Both men's fates also were alike, in that they revolted at roughly the same age, and fled from comfortable homes and easy existences to pursue their ideals; both also were alike in the poverty they subsequently endured. Moreover, they resemble each other in their ardent, uncompromising and disinterested worship of beauty and Art for Art's sake, a cult which would rule their days and is the finest feature in their destinies.

None the less are there differences in their external lives and, in especial, in the significant domain of sex. Here, two names will suffice to orient us: Jeanne and Virginia.

Of Baudelaire, too, it was said he was sexually impotent.¹ But in his case we should want to know what exactly was meant, for it is clear that his was no case of total inhibition, of that complete frustration of sex under which the author of *Loss of Breath* and the *Tales of the Grotesque* so evidently laboured.

Baudelaire, in his *Journaux intimes* has indeed written: "The more a man pursues the arts, the less he has erections.

"Ever more apparent becomes the split between the brute and intellect.

"Only the brute has fine erections and the lyricism of the crowd is copulation.

¹ Intimate friends of Baudelaire, in particular Nadar and Louis Ménard, as well as many of his admirers, among whom Prince Ourousof, Léon Deschamps and Jean de Mitty have maintained or agreed that Baudelaire *died a virgin*. (Quoted from Eugène et Jacques Crépét, loc. cit. p. 52, note 1.)

Léon Daudet, lecturing at the Salle Pleyel on June 18th, 1931, also quoted, in my hearing, a remark made to him by Félicien Rops, to the effect that Baudelaire had never had any physical relation with Jeanne Duval. As regards this, however, I prefer to side with Porché's opinion and especially Laforgue's, in the works already quoted.

"Copulation is to yearn to enter another and the artist never leaves himself."¹

But these bitter words must have been written at a time when opium had already greatly, if not wholly, extinguished all physical desire. We cannot accept them, post facto, at their face value and thus deny the testimony of his whole opus, or of the syphilis contracted before his twentieth year, or of his "good addresses" note-book.

The real situation must have been thus; if Baudelaire, in the latter part of his life, owing to opium's cumulative effects, became wholly impotent, we cannot, nevertheless, think he was so all his life. With his "madonnas", Marie or Apollonie, the relation, indeed, remained platonic; but with Jeanne, in the early days of their liaison and with the prostitutes he sought out, he could never have been content merely to look on, however much of a "viewer".

Nevertheless, his sensuality was doubtless essentially too perverse to satisfy itself in normal fashion. What specific carnal demands that perversity imposed, however, it is impossible to say.

But, given the deep-rooted sadism which impregnates all he wrote, we are justified in assuming that Baudelaire's sex life was influenced thereby, and may ask what scenes of flagellation or its simulacra, inflicted or received, were enacted with Jeanne? Possibly merely sadistic phantasies, before or during the sex-act, were necessary for the accomplishment of that act? However that be, we must remember that it was only attraction by proxy that drew him to Jeanne's dark skin, the original attraction being his memories of the whipped Mauritius negress. But she herself, with her ebony buttocks lashed raw, would never thus have excited the young man, had it not been for his latent deep-rooted sadism which, since infancy, was directed, in revenge, against another woman.

The whipped negress was but the black link enabling the poet's original perversion to shift from the fair mother of his infancy to the dark-skinned Jeanne Duval.

* * *

¹ "Plus l'homme cultive les arts, moins il bande.

"Il se fait un divorce de plus en plus sensible entre l'esprit et la brute.

"La brute seule bande bien et la fouterie est le lyrisme du peuple.

"Fouter, c'est aspirer à entrer dans un autre, et l'artiste ne sort jamais de lui-même."

Mon cœur mis à nu (feuillet 70 de Baudelaire, p. 39 du cahier) from the holograph MSS. in M. Armand Godoy's possession which he was kind enough to let me consult.



JEANNE DUVAL
(from the drawing by Baudelaire)

Poe's Message to Others

Now let us leave the poets' lives to pass to the no-less-real reality of their psychic existences, their phantasies and day-dreams, whose traces their works reveal. And, if we desire an immediate sense of the difference, despite the resemblances, in the psycho-sexuality of these poets, we have only to open *Les Fleurs du Mal* after reading *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

The Evil of which Baudelaire writes, is certainly not Poe's. Not only had Baudelaire not waited for Poe to appear, in order to become Baudelaire, but Poe would never have written any of the Frenchman's poems, just as Baudelaire could never have written any of the American's tales.

Firstly, Poe was chaste while Baudelaire was not. The latter's poems were banned for obscenity as well as for being sadistic, *i.e.*, aggression coupled with erotism. This is indeed far different from Poe who, though similarly dominated by the horrible, de-sexualises its expression.

Who, other than the psycho-analyst would recognise the killer in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* or *The Black Cat* as a lust murderer? But there can be no mistake about the nature of the buried instincts of the man who addressed the following lines to Apollonie.

Ainsi, je voudrais, une nuit,
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,
Vers les trésors de ta personne,
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,
Et faire à ton flanc étonné
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et, vertigineuse douceur!
A travers ces lèvres nouvelles
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,
T'infuser mon venin, ma sœur!¹

¹ Some night, at the love-hour, noiselessly, like a craven, I would crawl to your body's riches to chasten the blithe flesh, and bruise the breasts now forgiven and force a wide wound in your astonished thighs. Then, through the new lips, far lovelier, brighter, in dizzying rapture, instil my venom, O my sister!

From *Les Fleurs du Mal*, "A celle qui est trop gaie", CXXIX. This poem was inspired by Mme. Sabatier. It was one of the poems condemned when *Fleurs du Mal* was prosecuted and deservedly pronounced sadistic by the judges.

Poe and the Human Soul

If we sought to isolate all the sadism Baudelaire's writing contains we should have to quote almost everything he wrote. Unlike Poe, in whom only aggression and a predilection for death and the macabre appears, while his erotism conceals itself timidly in etherealised emotion, Baudelaire flaunts his sadism proudly. Erotism, with him, always appears as cruelty. "Cruelty and lust" he wrote "identical sensations, like extreme heat and cold."¹

If Poe was fundamentally necrophilist, as we saw, Baudelaire is revealed as a declared sadist; the former preferred dead prey or prey mortally wounded, despite the exception of *The Black Cat*; the latter preferred live prey and killing, despite the seeming exception of *La Charogne*.

* * *

How was it then, that despite these different sex lives, Baudelaire the sadist recognised a brother in the necrophilist Poe? What strings, in him, vibrated so harmoniously to the other's as to make him imagine that he found in Poe stories and poems he himself had adumbrated and, not only subjects he had dreamt, but sentences he had thought?

This particular problem raises that of the general relation of sadism to necrophilia and cannot be resolved except by an excursus into the theory of instincts. Given its primordial significance, we shall take sadism first.

The relation, in all living things, between the life and death instincts, is surely one of biology's and, also, psychology's darkest problems.² On the one hand, there is the urge to live, to self-preservation, to continuity and reproduction in all living substance, which is the very essence of the libido. On the other, by virtue of that principle which rules all nature and, especially, the instincts, an earlier condition always tends to repeat itself; this we call the *repetition-compulsion* of the instincts.

Now before life appeared, all matter was inanimate and it is to this

¹ "Cruauté et volupté, sensations identiques, comme l'extrême chaud et l'extrême froid."

Mon cœur mis à nu, XVII: Charles Baudelaire: *Œuvres posthumes et correspondances inédites*, op. cit., page 671, note 2.

² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, London, Hogarth Press, 1922. Trans. from *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 1920. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIV.

The Economic Problem in Masochism, *Collected Papers*, Vol. II, pp. 255-268, Hogarth Press, 1924-5. Trans. from *Das ökonomische Problem des Masochismus* 1924. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIII.

Civilization and its Discontents, op. cit., page 664, note.

inorganic condition that all substance tends to revert. This tendency is inherent in everything that lives; it is responsible for the gradual exhaustion, age and death of the cell, as of the organism; Freud has called this the *death-instinct*.

True, the death instinct is far less clamorous than the life instinct and prefers to work in obscurity, though none the less inevitably for that, at least, within the organism. But all developing things, plants or creatures, must go on eating and absorbing more space merely to continue their existence; thus they must destroy what surrounds them. Whereupon, the death instinct, originally shut inside the organism and directed against itself, turns on the outer world. The death instinct thus becomes the instinct of aggression and so serves the organism's life-instincts.

To what point the death instinct, when it turns against the outer world under the pressure of the life instincts, can remain unalloyed with the latter, *i.e.*, continue as *pure aggression* without becoming *sadism*, is a problem so far unsolved. Personally, I wonder whether such aggression is ever found pure, and whether the erotic pleasure bound up with aggression can ever be absent from it; the term erotic, of course, being taken here in its wide and Freudian sexual sense? The better, however, to establish our constants in this problem, let us now try to retrace the parallel outlines of the evolution of aggression and the development of the human libido.

At the outset, the newborn babe seeks food and sucks the breast it is offered. This is the first oral libidinal phase, dominated by sucking pleasure. The babe's aggression, still embryonic, limits itself to emptying, as best it can, the mother's breast, which so far is undifferentiated, for it, from the rest of the outer world.

Soon the babe begins to cut its first teeth. As it grows stronger, its demands increase, as also its impatience when it is hungry. And now, with its teeth, it tries to bite the breast that feeds it and, had it its way, would eat the flesh as readily as it sucks milk from it. This is the second oral libidinal phase in which aggression becomes cannibalistic, whence, by later displacement comes, in part, the human predilection to eat meat. Next the child enters a phase where, primarily, its anal zone holds sway, as also, the erotic pleasure felt in passing *fæces*. This is what Freud has called the anal-sadistic stage. Here the reader might well ask why this should be considered the sadistic stage in excelsis. There would seem to be two reasons for this. First, the child, then about two, now has a muscular system available, which system is our main instrument of aggression. Also, since the *fæces* detached from its body are the first inanimate material objects it learns to differentiate from its body, as also the first "gift" it can

make the mother, they are the prototype of all later "precious" objects which include those earthly possessions humanity so ruthlessly covets. Thus, infantile aggressiveness to acquire objects comes to birth at this stage. This is the time when children come to blows over toys. All this, however, hardly justifies the term anal and *sadistic* for this stage: anal and *aggressive* would be better.

Yet, as Freud has so truly observed and written: "In the promotion of sexual excitement through muscular activity we might recognize one of the sources of the sadistic impulse". And again: ". . . a number of persons report that they experienced the first signs of excitement in their genitals during fighting or wrestling with playmates . . ." As a result: "The infantile connection between fighting and sexual excitement acts in many persons as a determinant for the future preferred course of their sexual impulse".¹ Sadism, however, sends its roots into more than one region of the human compost for, if the pleasure in feeling the *fæces* pass the anal zone as we said, is directly erotic, what are they but a return of ingested organic substances to their original condition of inorganic matter? It is as though the child, in its anal phase, by a sort of endopsychic awareness, sensed that great law which turns every digestive apparatus into a "tomb" governed by its digestive processes. Would it not then, for the first time, by reason of its developing intelligence, realise what it had so far ignored; the fate reserved for things which had at first only gratified its oral erotism; things it had ingested oblivious of what happens to them inside? The day the child realises that the milk, the pap, the sugar or meat it most loves become, when absorbed and passed through the body, *fæces* and something destroyed, marks an important date in the history of the human psyche. Though the child narcissistically continues to love this separate part of its body, its *fæces*, before that love has become disgust owing to educative pressure and its training in cleanliness, it doubtless then feels a sort of destructive god, a small Siva and may psychically, though unwittingly, enjoy the obscure destruction, deep in its body, of what it most loves. And this delight in destruction may then begin to be projected on the outer world, thanks to its new and increasing muscular strength.²

Very soon, however,—for all these stages, detached from each other to

¹ *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, p. 63 (op. cit., page 664, note).

² I ignore here the "living" unconscious equations of the *fæcal* mass; *fæces*=penis=child. Since the context deals only with the relation between the anal stage and the aggressive instinct, I confine myself to the "dead" equivalents of the *fæces*; *fæces*=gift=gold or, on a still more primitive level, *fæces*=what is destroyed=corpse.

facilitate description, in reality overlap—very soon the phallic zone of the infant, the erogenous zone, par excellence, awakes. True, at the outset, the child has no genital orgasm, for this will appear more or less near puberty, though it is often difficult to discern exactly when it takes place. But the phallic zone awakes long before this: it awakes in the cradle, while the child is still in the oral phase. Indeed, the child often experiences genital excitement when suckling and thus a “biographical” relation is set up between genital excitement and the excitation of the oral zone, which relation survives in the kiss. When, however, having learnt mentally to *follow* the conversion of food into the fæcal-mass and, thereby, to realise the destruction implicit in its body, the child begins to project these destructive powers on the outer world via its muscular system, it soon transfers these powers on to its erectile organ, *i.e.*, the small phallus, endowed with movement and pleasurable sensations.

Indeed, the penis, by reason of the erectility which enlarges and hardens it and inspires the urge to push and pierce, seems specially adapted, of all the organs of the body—except the teeth and fingers—to be, par excellence, the instrument and weapon of aggression.

To this we must add that it is generally when the child is about two, *i.e.*, well into the anal-phallic phase and in full expansion of its anal erotism, with phallic erotism well developed that, as Freud has demonstrated, it manages to observe the coitus of adults: acts which it always interprets as the man’s sadistic attack on the woman. For the former, it imagines, brutally overcomes the woman and forcibly pierces her anus with his murderous penis.

This is the sadistic concept of coitus which leaves its indelible traces on the unconscious of every child present at such times and even on that of others who have witnessed the copulation of dogs or other animals. These indelible traces help to reinforce the original bond, which exists in us all, between our erotic and our cruelty instincts.

We learn from this rough picture of the development of human aggression and libido how difficult it is to separate these fundamental instincts from each other. No better than life, does description avail us here.

Yet life does make this effort and that in each one’s infancy, for we know that the child, at about five, attains its fullest infantile libidinal development and, therewith, the full flowering of its Œdipus complex in relation to the objects to which its libido turns. Now, it would seem that to the Œdipus complex, among others, falls a main part in the development of our instincts.

Two objects then present themselves clearly to the male child, in whom its maleness is now established; the mother he erotically desires and the encumbering rival father he wishes to brush away. Whence follows a *sorting out* of his instincts, his libido gravitating to the mother and his aggression to the father. This sorting out of the libidinal instincts is never, however, wholly accomplished; the father always attracts part of the child's love, while some of the aggressive elements in its libido remain fixated on the mother. None the less, some sorting out of the libidinal and aggressive instincts does take place at this time.

It is to the Œdipus complex, it would appear, that is reserved the task of unfastening and separating out the primitive and basic *ambivalence* of our feelings.

The last stage of the child's development, which Freud¹ has termed truly genital, as opposed to the infantile phallic stage, only establishes itself at puberty after the adolescent reactivation of the original Œdipus complex. This stage, according to Abraham,² should be characterised by the disappearance of ambivalence, representing mingled love and hate feelings for the same object. This condition of pure love, of which the child's Œdipus complex was but a prelude is, however, inevitably an ideal which, possibly, no one has ever attained. But what, in my opinion, can alone liberate love in the highest degree from its originally aggressive part, is a powerful and distinctive Œdipus complex. For aggression, contrary to libido, is less readily suppressed or sublimated, and often only changes its object and finds a different outlet. The aggression primarily mingled with the love for both father and mother, by being directed on the former, releases the love for the mother in the degree to which this canalisation succeeds; thereupon the way is open, not merely to phallic love but to love that is truly genital.

As to what happens, in civilisation, to the aggression which is drained off and directed against the father, this has been amply dealt with by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* and *Civilisation and its Discontents*. When education succeeds in its aims the aggression, to some extent, is intuned

¹ Cf. Freud, *The Infantile Organisation of the Libido*, *Collected Papers*, 1924-5, Vol. II, pp. 244-249. Trans. from *Die infantile Genitalorganisation*, 1923. *Ges. Werke*, Band XIII.

² Cf. Abraham, *A Short Study of the Development of the Libido*, op. cit., page 219, note.

and does not become unduly erotised: we then know it as the individual's moral conscience or super-ego.¹

* * *

Nevertheless, the evolution and infantile sorting-out of our instincts are subject to various vicissitudes. In civilisation, with so-called normal men, things happen much as we described. In the neurotic, however, his erotised aggression has been turned back on himself to become, as it were, hyper-morality. In born criminals, on the other hand, the aggressive instinct, especially, has retained freer expression, for which reason and to illustrate our theme, we shall now outline the main types of murderers.

Crimes of blood may be divided into three great categories; crimes of passion, robbery and lust murders. Crimes of passion are the murder of one man by another to possess a woman, or the murder of one woman by another to possess a man; in addition to which we have those other forms in which an abandoned mistress or lover jealously slays the beloved. It is, however, in the first of these crimes, those of man against man, that aggression appears least combined with erotic factors for, in fact, it stems direct from the parricidal œdipal aggression phantasied by the child. For all fixations may be ill-omened given the repetition-compulsion they imply, whether they originate in an overstrong adherence to the Œdipus complex or in one too weak, the latter determining regression to the primitive and perverse libidinal positions with which we shall now deal.

Robbery-murders are infinitely less "œdipal" than crimes of passion. It is likely that, in general, thieves *take* what, in childhood, they were insufficiently *given*: love and material testimonies of the mother's love, represented, in the pregenital stage, by food and toys. At times, even, they may kill those who stand in the way of their belated seizure of what they consider themselves owed by society; that society which, in the unconscious, is doubtless equated with the pre-œdipal mother. This is an attitude predominantly anal, transferred to every object; it is almost, indeed, a sublimation of anal eroticism, equating food=fæces=gift=gold.

The third category of murderers most interests us here. It is the least numerous of the three and comprises individuals who remain fixated at, or have regressed to, the most primitive stage of the libido; individuals in

¹ I have not here dealt with the evolution of the libido and aggression in the little girl. Their evolution seems at first parallel, then opposite to what happens in the small boy as regards love-objects. But it would need a volume to deal with this subject.

whom aggression and erotism are closely intertwined and who have least succeeded in that *sorting-out* of instincts we have already described. These are the lust-murderers.¹

A strong constitutional predisposition is doubtless needed before the, nevertheless, rare perversion of lust-murder can develop. But given that inherent base this is how we imagine the specific lust murderer would have developed.

After what was doubtless an especially stormy and aggressive passage through the various pre-œdipal phases of libidinal development, these children eventually reached the œdipal stage. Whereupon their aggression against the father, either encountered a counter-aggression equally great² which, with its castration threat, side-tracked though did not suppress the original aggressive aim, that of the father's œdipal destruction, with the result that the aggression fell back on its pre-œdipal libidinal positions and object relationships, or by virtue of a constitutional retardation of instinctual affect, the œdipal aggression against the father never really took root. In the lust murderer, the Œdipus complex, in some sort, must always have been impaired. To my knowledge the lust murderer is never a parricide, also.³

Be that as it may, when we come to the manifest sadism of the adult murderer this is what happens: the lust murderer who generally, as his victims, chooses women or children or growing boys—often doubtless

¹ In German *Lustmörder* (lust murderers) in contrast to *Raubmörder* (theft murderers).

² Similar mechanisms must be operative in prisons and other such establishments, for markedly aggressive types, and they certainly do not all regress to a sadistic level, emerge at least more aggressive than they enter them.

³ Franz Alexander, whose psycho-analytic work on criminals is well known (Alexander and Staub, *The Criminal, the Judge and the Public*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1931. Trans. from *Der Verbrecher und seine Richter*, Vienna, Int. Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1929), in a conversation with me in Vienna in the summer of 1931, said that in his opinion lust murderers would always be cowards who had recoiled from the œdipal aggression of man to man and equal to equal. To this negative tropism of the lust murderer as compared with the parricide, it is necessary to add the very powerful and positive tropism that its primitive pre-œdipal positions exert on the libido, in which aggression and erotism remain intertwined, under the domination of the infantile and sadistic conception of coitus.

Here we must quote the work by Hanns SACHS, *Zur Genese der Perversionen*, *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse*, 1923, IX, where the author well shows that, in general, among perverts, there is a sort of alliance between the main libidinal elements and the tendency to repression of the Œdipus complex.

substitutes for the brothers and sisters he envied and desired as a child—re-enacts, in life, the infantile concept of coitus as imagined by the child during the parents' coitus. He is a spectator, who once saw an imaginary tragedy on the stage, believed it real and enacts it himself in real life.

The erotic phallic element in these infantile concepts is often represented, in such case, by the symbol of a knife or other murderous weapon. Lust murderers are men who take this symbolism literally; knives to them, for instance, are a true fetish, in their sexual connotation, and come to seem to them part of their body. The sadist is generally impotent in normal coitus and it is the murderous sawing of the steel through his victim's flesh which procures the increasing excitement that ends in the ejaculation which, for normal men, is linked with the similar movements of the penis in the vagina.

The oral erotic factor in this murderer also approximates to the infantile ideal. Murderer "lovers", instead of kissing the women they love like normal lovers, readily drink the blood, or bite or even eat the flesh of their victims, exactly as the suckling bites, and would like to eat, its mother's breast.

The anal-erotic factor here, too, is represented in its crudest, least-changed form. Whereas, with the robber-murderer, gold and coveted possessions already constitute a "displacement", almost a sublimation of infantile fæces, the lust murderer seems to stick at the stage where the child has discovered the destructive powers in its bowels and, thanks to its developing muscular system, projects them on the outer world in an orgy of destruction which reminds us of the God Siva. In the same way that, in infancy, the phallus, organ par excellence of erectility and pleasure, served this predilection for destruction—helped by the sadistic concept of coitus observed as a babe—so too the murderer's penis, by way of its steel fetish and double becomes the organ which, indirectly, carries out the erotised act of aggression.

Thus, while the crime-of-passion murderer is œdipal, and the robber-murderer infinitely less so, having regressed to the pregenital stage of oral and anal desires, the lust-murderer presents a most intricate mingling of the two greatest and most primitive instincts of mankind; the erotic and aggressive instincts, the instincts of life and death.¹

* * *

The manner in which other men react to the three categories of crime

¹ See E. Wulffen: *Der Sexualverbrecher*, Berlin, Langenscheidt, 1928. The sections on sadism are highly instructive.

we have rapidly traced is, indeed, characteristic. Crimes-of-passion murderers, because no self-interest is discerned and all adult males sense themselves, without overmuch condemnation, potentially such at heart, generally meet with the sympathy of both the jury and public.¹

Robbery-murderers, on the other hand, produce a drab and repulsive effect which, in fact, corresponds to our especially strongly repressed anal drives. They, as it were, smell bad. They only begin to have glamour in the ample proportions of highwaymen of the past or American "gangsters," doubtless because they at times risk their lives which, to some extent, equates them with warring conquerors whose phallic virility amply compensates for their greed.

Quite other, however, is the effect produced by lust-murderers. When one of these great perverts such as Vacher² or Kürten³ appears on the scene, men who kill simply for pleasure, a wave of excitement sweeps through the masses. Nor is this due merely to horror but to a strange interest in the crime, which is our deep-rooted sadism's response to theirs. It is as though, civilised and wretched, with our instincts fettered, we were all, in some way, grateful to these great and disinterested criminals for offering us, from time to time, the spectacle of our most culpable, primitive desires enacted at last.

Obscurely we sense, though we dare not admit it, that perhaps it was

¹ Regicides, one of the most typical categories of œdipal murderers, by "displacement" from the father to the head of a state are not, ordinarily, regarded with sympathy. It is as though the masses needed to defend themselves from their latent unconscious aggression against their leaders, as was shown yet again by the trial, expert opinions on, and death sentence upon, Gorgoulov, obviously a paranoiac, who in 1932 assassinated President Doumer.

² A. Laccasagne, *Vacher l'Eventreur et les crimes sadiques*, Lyon, A. Storck et Cie.; Paris, Masson et Cie., 1899. The railwayman, Joseph Vacher, confessed to eleven lust murders committed between 1894 and 1897 and was executed at Bourg on December 31st, 1898.

³ Peter Kürten, the vampire of Dusseldorf, born 1883, of a brutal, hard-drinking father and a kind, gentle mother, was the oldest surviving son of a family of ten children. The whole family lived in one room and Kürten remembered having witnessed the coitus of the parents which, according to him, was a kind of rape. His father was unbelievably harsh and tried to reduce his aggression by counter-aggression equally strong which only, however, increased the child's aggression. At nine he drowned two of his little playmates in the Rhine. When Peter was thirteen his father was condemned to eighteen months' imprisonment for incest with his eldest daughter, acts at which Peter must also have been present. Also at thirteen, Peter, for the first time, engaged in acts that might truly be called sadistic, in connection with sheep. At seventeen, he

they who had enjoyed erotic pleasure in its starkest, purest form. Nature knows nothing of finality and it is only belatedly that the libido subserves reproduction. And the nearer gratification remains to its instinctual origins, the more intense it will be. The great lust murderers, though at the price of their lives, succeed in winning, in one voluptuous spasm, the ecstasy bound in the two supreme, commingled instincts which rule the world; the libidinal instinct of life and the aggressive instinct of death. And "what matters the eternity of damnation to him who, for an instant, finds the infinity of joy".⁴

True, as punishment, possibly through envy and, surely, through sadism too, the community demands that the heads of these lust-murderers fall. None the less however, is it true, that the rare spectacle they provide constitutes a sort of immense *catharsis* for the masses reduced to virtue and forced compliance.

* * *

For, deep and latent in each human heart, there dwell the three types of criminals we have examined. The crime-of-passion murderer who sleeps in us all is surely he who, before the tribunal of our consciences, as before that of society, meets with most sympathy. The robber-murderer comes under a far stronger taboo for, whereas many a man might readily

made his first strangling attempt on a girl. He was to spend nearly twenty-four years of his life in prison, mainly for theft. In prison, he gave himself up to sadistic phantasies which led to orgasms and, after his release, sought to carry them out. Incendiarism alternated with lust-murders. In 1913 Kürten committed his first lust-murder on a little girl he found asleep during a burglary. He was then returned to prison, once more for theft, his murder still undiscovered. Not until 1929 did he commit the series of nearly thirty lust-murders which terrorised Düsseldorf for a year. In 1923 Kürten married a woman three years his senior, whom he respected, and with whom he was only potent to a minor degree. In normal coitus with women, the erection subsided fairly quickly. It was only lust murder that restored it. Even without erection, aggression brought orgasm. There was no sexual excitement stronger, for him, than the sound of dripping blood, and drinking it. Since the law finds no extenuating circumstances in an abnormal sexual constitution, Peter Kürten was executed on July 2nd, 1931. (See KARL BERG, *Der Sadist, Gerichtärztliches und Kriminalpsychologisches zu den Taten des Düsseldorfer Mörders*, Deutsche Zeitschrift für die gesamte gerichtliche Medizin, Berlin, Julius Springer, 1931, Vol. 17, heft 4-5.)

⁴ "Qu'importe l'éternité de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l'infini de la jouissance!" Baudelaire: *Petits poèmes en prose*, IX: *Le mauvais vitrier*.

kill for a woman, few indeed, among the honest, would think themselves capable of robbery even under favourable conditions.

As for lust-murder, this, in those whose libido has normally developed, is lost in a past so remote, so deeply suppressed, that most of my readers would cry out in protest if told that each in himself harbours a lust-murderer.

Nevertheless, such is the case. That first intermingling of the erotic and aggressive instincts in the pregenital infantile stage of the libido, seems to be a biological law. Just as frequent is the infantile sadistic concept of coitus, imaging a mortal battle which ends in the woman's defeat, which picture each of us retains in his unconscious.

In homosexuality, determined by the underlying bisexuality of human beings, sadism or rather sado-masochism—for sadism readily falls back on that first object of the death-instinct, the ego—is, thus, the most universal and fundamental of the perverse components of the human libido.

Sadism, however, in our civilisation, cannot find means to gratify itself in true, primitive fashion. To win its right to dwell in our midst it must transform and sublimate itself and become—abandoning its crude erotic hue—the urge to conquer either women, glory, or knowledge, and bend the universe to its will in ways society may, or may not, approve. Then, the fierce god with raised knife may become unrecognisable and be worshipped.

It is however, when, as in the neurotics we call obsessionals, it dons the hypocritical mask of social morality, that sadism best extorts the adoration of its worshippers. Morality, as Freud has so well demonstrated,¹ in essence, is the turning back on the self, in guise of moral conscience, of the aggression active in us all. When this aggression is over-erotised, we then have the picture of the obsessional neurotic with his doubts and excessive scruples, tormented for himself and for those about him. For sadism and masochism are one and the same instinct which merely differ as regards their object.

Nevertheless human sadism, at times, like all our instincts, must perforce find somewhat more direct though permissible forms of satisfaction and here, too, as whenever we are too harassed by our over-repressed instincts, art comes to our aid. Is not art's function to release, by the pleasure-premium with which it lures us, other and more intense possibilities of pleasure which derive from the fictive satisfaction of exceedingly culpable and strongly repressed desires, in the vanguard of

¹ *Civilisation and its Discontents*, op. cit., page 664, note.

which we find sadism, where erotism and aggression are freely expressed? Thus to-day, when instinct clamours for release, it need not surprise us to find so many contemporaries think Lamartine, Musset and Victor Hugo insipid and too humanitarian, while proclaiming Baudelaire the greatest French poet of the nineteenth century.

Not only is it the perfection of form in *Les Fleurs du Mal* which provides an æsthetic pleasure-premium of such rare quality, but its content and inspiration has a strain we all seek in vain in Lamartine, Musset or Victor Hugo. This passionate, deep, heart-rending strain wells from the poet's sadism; it is more than the condiment of his *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *Poèmes en prose*; it is their very pith and marrow.

True, when Baudelaire hurled his seven knives into the heart of his Madonna, or phantasied himself "forcing a wide wound" in his Apollonie's thighs, then in "dizzy rapture" "instilling" his "venom", it need not have necessarily followed that erection accompanied these representations. Of that we know nothing! But the pleasure which accompanied these representations was none the less, in essence, erotic, however cerebral it might be as, indeed, it is for the innumerable readers who, nowadays, delight in *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

Though in the fictive sadism which art releases in us there is, indeed, less intensity than in the sadistic act and though it does not lead to orgasm we do, at least, through literary sadism, gain in duration and the quality of pleasure, what we lose in intensity of feeling.

* * *

Our lengthy excursus into the theory of instincts and then our return to Baudelaire, strange to say, have brought us within sight of our objective. For, if the universal sadism latent in us all explains the continuous appeal of an artist like Baudelaire, by the same token it will also explain, as we shall see, the deepest reason for Poe's influence on Baudelaire and on us.

One objection, however, remains valid. Poe, in essence, was not a sadist but a necrophilist. And necrophilia, possibly, has not the same universal appeal as sadism to the human psyche.

For necrophilia, when manifest, seems even more unusual, more frightful than sadism and, when some outstanding necrophilist appears, like Bertrand¹ or Ardisson, he arouses a far greater disgust in the masses than the sadist, for he outrages both our moral and æsthetic sense.

¹ Sergeant Bertrand, a kind and pleasant-looking soldier, was condemned by the 2nd Paris Military Courts in 1849, to one year's imprisonment for repeatedly breaking open tombs in Paris cemeteries. (See *Affaire du sergent François*

A glance at the rare cases of necrophilia dealt with in the literature on the subject shows that there appear to be three possible forms of this perversion.

The first, for instance, exemplified by men like Ardisson,¹ comes lowest in the scale; namely, absence of differentiation between the living and dead. We know that Ardisson, besides being half-witted had, also, no sense of smell. The smell of corruption was, therefore, no obstacle and, being a sexton, he had many opportunities! In short he revenged himself for the disdain and rebuffs of living women by copulating with the always docile dead.

The second form of necrophilia would appear to be that of a Bertrand, about whom, unfortunately, we have only the barest details, given the prudishness current during the middle of the last century. Bertrand, who seems to have been specially attracted by female corpses, delighted in mutilating, stabbing and hacking them exactly as sadists do the living, and only afterwards possess them; again like the sadist. It was in connection with cases of this most typical form of necrophilia that Krafft-Ebing, contrasting it with the foregoing form, in which docility in the partner is primarily sought, wrote very justly: "Possibly some remnant of a moral scruple makes them recoil from the idea of inflicting cruelty on a living woman; possibly their imaginations as it were, overleap the lust-murder to jump at its consequences, the corpse".²

Thus, between straight-forward sadists and such kinds of sado-necrophilists there would be, roughly, the same sort of difference as between the lion, which attacks live prey, and the hyena which generally confines itself to dead.

These necrophilists, in fact, seem to be timid or intimidated sadists. But what psycho-analysis can tell us about them does not stop there. For

Bertrand, du 74^e de Ligne, devant le 2^e Conseil de Guerre de Paris, Gazette des Tribunaux du 11 juillet 1849; Lunier, Examen médico-légal d'un cas de monomanie instinctive: affaire du sergent Bertrand, Annales médico-psychologiques, tome XIII, 1849, Vol. I, pp. 351-389; and Michea, Des déviations malades de l'appétit vénérien, Union médicale, 17 juillet, 1849.)

¹ Victor Ardisson, a half-wit and sexton at Muy (Var), being found guilty of repeated violations of tombs and corpses, after expert medico-legal testimony, was consigned, in 1901, to the asylum at Pierrefeu (Var), where I was able to see him on September 22nd, 1931. (See Michel Belletrud and Ed. Mercier: *Contribution à l'étude de la nécrophilie. L'affaire Ardisson*, Paris, Steinheil, 1906; and Epaulard, *Thèse sur le vampirisme*, Lyon, A. Storck et Cie., 1901.)

² R. v. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Stuttgart, Ferdinand Enke, 1912, 14th edition, p. 84.

psycho-analysis has taught us that infantile observation of adult coitus is always interpreted as an attack by the man on the woman. Now necrophilists, like sadists and, indeed, almost all human beings, in infancy, have observed such scenes.

Between the sadist and the sado-necrophilist, however, each of whom is fixated or has regressed to the pregenital stages of instinct governed by the sadistic conception of coitus, there must be a difference in the points at which they are fixated on this murderous picture of adult coitus.

Whereas sadists with their, doubtless, constitutionally intenser and less amenable aggressive instincts dare to identify themselves wholly, later, with the murderer-father, necrophilists, inherently more timid and so, intimidated, (Bertrand himself was a mild, timid, melancholy man), are content to snuggle against the mother-woman killed by that god-like father which fate seems to all men. There, they confine themselves either to snatching the father's leavings or, as is mostly the case, reproduce the murderous father's acts on the corpse as simulacrum of the living woman and that to the extent even, at times, of regressing to the cannibalistic stage of the sadist. In so doing they save themselves from real aggression and evade capital punishment.

As to the third form of necrophilia, we do not know how often it occurs in reality, given the difficulty of establishing the facts. It is the necrophilia arising from fidelity which, in connection with Poe, we have already dealt with at length.

How rarely, indeed, do we hear of distracted lovers lying with their loved ones after death, their passion refusing to relinquish its object and thus, in one mighty upsurge conquering humanity's usual disgust for the bodies of the dead! How frequently such happenings occur it is impossible to know.

In any case, instances of this form of necrophilia belong mainly to legend. "The most normal form of necrophilia" writes Jones "seems to be not much more than an extension of the part love plays in mourning; the frantic refusal to accept the event and to separate for ever from the beloved".¹ Jones then quotes numerous instances of this form of necrophilia cited by ancient authors: that by Herodotus, for instance, according to which the tyrant Periander was said to have lain with his wife Melissa after her death; that of King Herod who, having had his wife murdered, was said to have lain with her seven years; and the similar legends connected with King Waldemar IV and Charlemagne. He then shows how

¹ E. JONES, *On the Nightmare*, p. 111, London, Hogarth Press, 1930.

frequently more recent authors have exploited this theme: Heinrich von Kleist in *La Marquise d'O*, Otto Ludwig in *Marie*, Heine in *Beschwörung*, Zacharias Werner in *Kreuzesbrüder*, Brentano in *Romanzen vom Rosenkranz* and de Sade in *Fuliette*. To this list we would add Victor Hugo, whose Quasimodo quenches his passion for the living dancer, Esmeralda, on her hanged body in the grave.

Now it is just the fact that this form of necrophilia is dealt with in literature and legend which attracts our notice. If it has thus been raised to the rank of a myth, it must be because it responds to a latent human ideal; that of love surviving the grave and of eternal fidelity.

This is the attenuating circumstance in necrophilia and what makes it morally and æsthetically acceptable, even poetical: as though this last of its forms were a supreme sort of love.

* * *

Thus, throughout Poe's life, as we readily see, two kinds of necrophilia were present in him, though latent and transferred from object to object; the necrophilia of fidelity and sado-necrophilia proper. One, in effect, does not exclude the other, and fidelity to the love object may manifest itself in all the numerous ways love is expressed.

Nor in Baudelaire, either, was sadistic hatred inimical to faithful love. This was why Poe's writings could strike so many echoes in Baudelaire's soul.

On one hand the deep-rooted sadism of a Baudelaire was to recognise itself, almost unchanged in Poe's sado-necrophilia for, to the sadist in Baudelaire, Poe's necrophilia, as expressed in his life and work, represented a sort of ideal. Whereas Baudelaire's mother, loved and hated, lived on inaccessible to her son's seven knives of sadism, fate, in Poe's life as in his opus, had achieved that to which Baudelaire's sadism aspired; his mother's death and all its train of putrefaction. Thus, in his "brother's" works, Baudelaire could intoxicate himself at leisure with the putrescent miasmas which aureoled the mother's corpse; she, in this manner, being duly possessed and punished.

On the other hand, however, the eternal-fidelity element in Poe's necrophilia, through fixation on the mother of his infancy which inspires everything he wrote, would echo no less deeply in Baudelaire's heart. Despite Jeanne and his low women, was he not also, always, desperately faithful to his mother? Here he could surely salute, in Poe, his transatlantic "brother".

Even Poe's rarefied loves and impotence—the latter unknown to

Poe's Message to Others

Baudelaire, but doubtless unconsciously sensed—could only have seemed to Baudelaire, in moments of disgust with Jeanne, a sort of fidelity ideal. Poe, at least, had been able to experience the purest affection for a beloved wife, a wife who, though she spat blood and was consumptive, could resuscitate for him, far better than Jeanne for Baudelaire, the beloved mother he had known as a child; the mother who, for his sake, had died rather than remarry.

Finally, Poe's life showed Baudelaire yet another infantile ideal of maternal tenderness achieved. Had not Poe been loved, cared for and always forgiven, like a child, even in his worst excesses, by the "mother" he again found in Maria Clemm? Thus, Baudelaire's respectful dedication to the latter, of his translation of Poe's tales, the *Histoires extraordinaires*, sounds like a heart's cry to Caroline, his own mother; "Mother, why aren't you so!"

* * *

We have only dealt at such length with the way Baudelaire was possessed by Poe, because it provides the best, most striking example of what moves men's hearts in Poe.

The two kinds of necrophilia which are the very material of Poe's inspiration also, in fact, echo elsewhere than in the frankly sadistic soul of a Baudelaire, as witness the innumerable editions of his *Tales* which have appeared in all tongues and climes during the century since he died. This is even better proof than the irresistible spell he has cast over so many writers.

We have already spoken of the sadism dormant in all human hearts. As to fidelity, the reader will readily admit that it is one of humanity's noblest ideals. More even; for this ideal is always, more or less, the reproduction of our universal fixation on those whom we loved in infancy. Each of us, deep in himself, continues faithful to them and to an extent which our, sometimes, lifelong efforts to tear ourselves away, prevent us from realising. Despite ourselves, we rediscover these loves in every new love on which we embark. Whoever has analysed human beings has learnt to see that it is this original fidelity, this profound unconscious fixation on our, do what we may, ineradicable first loves which, as the history of every neurotic shows, determines most of humanity's psychic suffering.

This need not, however, surprise us. Human fidelity to the past is only one instance of the repetition-compulsion which governs instinctual life as also, in any case, biology; for this repetition, itself, but derives from the law of inertia which governs nature.

Poe and the Human Soul

Thus, justifiably, mankind continues to be enthralled by the striking pictures Poe draws, on the one hand, of man's unshakable fidelity to the past and his lost loves and, on the other, of that deep-rooted sadism which, in us all, while we live, is always ready to wake to life.

* * *

The immense cathartic value of an opus like Poe's appears still more clearly when we think what universal misery burdens men's lives and even, extending our vision, of what Schopenhauer called the misery of the universe, or *Weltschmerz*.

True, it is fine to be an optimist and always press on; to believe in kindness, in the beauty of life, as youth so often does. But this is the vision of illusion, not of reality. It is only the pessimists who are right. For, as Pascal well said: "It is a terrible thing to feel everything one has oozing away"¹ and, again: "the last act is slaughter, however fine the rest of the play" . . .²

For this universal misery, the remedy found by religions is to move happiness and life to eternity. Man's unconscious, which senses itself immortal, gave them birth and still remains their accessory.

Yet, every day a greater silence falls on the "ancient songs" with which poor humanity lulled its wretchedness and not even the great socialist leader who proclaimed these words or his peers, even in Moscow! have managed to bring paradise to earth for, whatever man does, the last act of the play will always be slaughter, thus justifying the pessimists.

Wherefore, for the world's misery, only two remedies remain to man. That which Freud suggests in *Civilisation and its Discontents*: to displace his own narcissism upon humanity in general, and live and work, careless of our transitory existences, for that larger unity comprised by the race. But few souls are capable of so much sublimation and the world's misery goes on.

Fortunately for man's adaptation to that world of misery in which he must perforce dwell, this rare solution, namely love's, is not the only one offered. There is another, however unpleasing it may seem, as remedy for his *Weltschmerz*; namely, that of erotised aggression or sadism. Civilised man, though inhibited and gentle-seeming, may nevertheless delight in the mishaps of others and even in those that menace himself. Actually,

¹ C'est une chose horrible de sentir s'écouler tout ce qu'on possède. *Pensées*, III, 212.

² Le dernier acte est sanglant, quelque belle que soit la comédie en tout le reste; . . . *Pensées*, III, 210.

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reluctant as he is to confess it, he always finds some degree of mental pleasure in the many catastrophes that occur, however much, in consciousness, he may deplore them. This has its uses, for it enables him to live and die; in short, to adapt himself to the ill-chance which rules the world.

The general interest in newspapers, full of every atrocity and catastrophe, is striking testimony to this universal and spectacular sadism in man. The passion for the crime-film is only its most recent manifestation. A long time has passed since Aristotle first glimpsed the deeper nature of the *catharsis* wrought by Greek tragedy in the spectator's soul.

Works of art, which leave out ill-chance and confine themselves to happiness and sweetness, always seem more or less insipid. In art, our libidinal instincts imperiously demand expression and, almost as much, our instincts of aggression. That is why, mostly, the hero or heroine must perish.

Nevertheless, among the elect, among those artists whose function is to bring about, in others, the *catharsis* of their repressed instincts, a special position must be reserved to those who, at once great writers and latent but confessed sadists, could chant their erotic aggression against that first of all victims, the mother—woman. That is why, so long as books and men exist, Poe's grim contribution, like Baudelaire's, to "the heaven of art", will always bind men as with a spell. They will read and shudder: a shudder which Victor Hugo mistakenly called "new", although as ancient as sadism and, so, man.

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 2. Int. Ps-a. V. = Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, Vienna
 3. Imago = Imago, Vienna
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